

**Transformational Dialogue through Socratic  
Circles Pedagogy: Deep learning and social cohesion  
in microcosms of democratic communities**

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian Catholic University

November 2020

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in this thesis have received the approval of the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee.

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## Abstract

Values related to social cohesion, that are explored, understood and developed through interactions and dialogue can have a humanising effect on the learning environment. A re-engagement with the enduring and evolving aims of education presents an opportunity for educators to recreate classrooms as microcosms of the ideal democratic community. The role of pedagogy in providing an architecture for an education towards social cohesion, encompassing critical and creative thinking, communicative competence and relationship-building, is central to its success. However, what is not easily understood or applied, is how an education in these values might be achieved within contemporary school settings.

Socratic Circles is a formal, structured discussion-based pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. In such an approach, learners employ purposeful reading and speaking strategies to enhance the expression of ideas conducive to promoting learning, individual wellbeing and social cohesion among adolescents. This research examines a pedagogical response to the values education reform effort implemented by the Commonwealth Government of Australia in the period 2002–2010. It focuses on the use of Socratic Circles as a pedagogical tool in teaching, understanding and demonstrating values in the context of adolescent learning in a cross-sectoral cluster of secondary schools in Melbourne, Australia. The identification of Transformational Dialogue achieved through Socratic Circles Pedagogy as both an effective process and positive outcome in the context of values, affirms its relevance as a contemporary educational approach.

The Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes framework brings together the key structural, contextual and foundational conditions and practices for the application of effective pedagogy as part of comprehensive curriculum reform for student learning. In the context of this research, Socratic Circles Pedagogy offers a mechanism for Transformational Dialogue. This pedagogical choice is characteristically agentic, that is, the individual is both an agent of change and is changed, within the community of learners, by the agency of others. When considering the educational imperatives of deep learning related to contemporary issues such as shared values, the achievement of Transformational Dialogue through the Socratic Circles Pedagogy is possible.

## Acknowledgements

For my parents, Patrick & Teresa Devine, and for my children, Rose & Teresa Devine-Hercus, and in loving memory of my aunt, Sr Monica Devine (MSHR) [1934-2018]

It is with sincere gratitude that I acknowledge those who guided and supported me through this research study:

Firstly, I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Dr Jonathon Sargeant, for his expert guidance, invaluable advice, and constructive feedback throughout this research.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Associate Professor William Sultmann, for his positive encouragement and thought-provoking insights.

I acknowledge my former supervisor, Emeritus Professor Judith Chapman, for her enthusiastic support of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster and affirmation during the early stages of my study. I would like to thank Honorary Associate Professor Marian de Souza, for her expertise regarding spirituality in intercultural settings, and Professor Alexander Kostogriz, for his insights into dialogicality.

I am indebted to those who participated in this research for their contribution, in particular the students and teachers from the five schools of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster. Thanks to Meredith Berry for always encouraging innovation.

A personal thanks to Maria O'Callaghan, Michelle McCarty and Angie Di Donato, for their loyal friendship.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my parents and family. To my siblings, Ann, Martin, John and Michael, for their support, and Kirsteen, a fellow teacher, for her encouragement. Special thanks to my daughters Tess and Rose who have buoyed me with humour and empathy. Finally, my deepest gratitude to Matthew, for his understanding and kindness.

I acknowledge that this study took place on the lands of the traditional custodians, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and I pay my respects to Elders past and present. With respect to First Nations culture, I recognise the tradition of *Yarning Circles* practised for millennia.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction and Overview

Where educational discourse is dominated by the measurement and comparison of academic outcomes, the enduring purpose of education is potentially constrained by a disproportionate focus on standards, achievement and qualification (Biesta, 2009). Notwithstanding, there is a re-emergence of more nuanced thinking about the transformative potential of education. Educators, and the systems that support them, seek to engage with a multidimensional appreciation of the purpose of education as responsive to the needs of the whole person for personal fulfilment, citizenship and community, alongside the imperatives of qualification and subjectification (Biesta, 2009). This imperative, recognised by the Australian Government (DEST, 2005), acknowledges that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills, and is most prescient in the concept and implementation of values education. The reconceptualisation of “building character” as values education (Arthur, 2005) recognises the significant history of such education in schools that draws on a range of philosophies, beliefs and traditions. In recent years, values education initiatives and reforms nationally and internationally have recognised the need to re-engage with educational processes that support the enablement of democratic communities and the significance of giving students agency and learning in character development.

Widespread debate about the place of values education in Australian schools is not new (Aspin & Chapman, 2007; Hill, 1991). Arguably, every endeavour in education is implicitly predicated upon values, and, as such, the educative process is not values-neutral (Hill, 1991). Furthermore, this reality behoves educators to make explicit those shared values determined by the community to hold significance (Aspin & Chapman, 2007; Gutman, 1987; Pascoe, 2002). Any discussion about values education in Australian schools engages with the question about what schools can and ought to do (Hill, 1991). A refinement of the question of the purpose of schooling in a democratic society identifies key challenges facing educators and young people.

The Australian initiative in values education emerged from a public conversation about the extent to which values were being, and/or could, and should be taught in schools. The Melbourne Declaration, and its most recent re-iteration the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Declaration, outlines the aim to develop qualities of good citizenship. Values articulated in the National Framework of Values Education 2003 – 2010, and elaborated in National and State Curriculum Frameworks since, identify priority capabilities necessary for citizenship, namely:

personal and social learning; creative and critical thinking; ethical and intercultural understanding. Collectively, these capabilities serve to build and maintain social cohesion.

Values education has been described as a goal that is familiar. It is sharing “something already known to be important” (Sultmann, 2005, p. 1) and recognised as a continuing priority within all sectors of education in Australia. Values are explored, understood and developed through interaction and dialogue which can have a humanising effect on the learning environment. Values education provides an opportunity to recreate classroom communities as microcosms of the ideal community (Hawkes, 2007). The role of pedagogy in providing an architecture for an education in values that results in outcomes encompassing critical and creative thinking, communicative competence and relationship-building is central to its success. However, what is not easily understood and applied is how values education might be achieved within contemporary school settings.

### **1.1 Citizenship Education**

The local and global reality of increasing polarisation of ideologies and ensuing conflicts, presents an opportunity for educational communities to build the capacities of young people to solve complex issues with others. A dialogical approach to teaching and learning creates opportunities to develop knowledge and skills for constructive citizenship. Deep learning, guided by a pedagogy of dialogue, has the potential to contribute to individual growth and community-building. Adoption of such an approach allows for a multiplicity of perspectives and reveals assumptions for critical reflection. A dialogical approach to pedagogy promotes student voice and agency and creates a community of learners open to building on the knowledge and understanding of others.

Young people, recognised as full citizens, have a vital role in imagining and creating more peaceful and cohesive societies and yet, adolescent learners often experience a sense of disconnection and disengagement from learning. The pedagogical choices that educators make can contribute to critical and creative thinking, enable more democratic communication processes, and engender relationship-building. This is an imperative as our communities, including school communities, become more culturally diverse. School leaders and teachers can support the development of deep, authentic intercultural understanding based upon respectful relationships. To sustain such an imperative, a concerted effort supported by governments and educational institutions is necessary. Young people need to develop social confidence for active citizenship while having a sense of identity and a positive regard for their own cultural history.

Key international, national and local organisations endorse the broad aims of education beyond the improvement of knowledge and skills. As outlined in the formative UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within; Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century* (Delors, 1996b), education is challenged to recognise an individual awareness of one's background, providing a point of reference that enables the student to determine their place in the world, whilst at the same time, teaching respect for other cultures. Individuals who develop social confidence relate well to others in a variety of contexts and, with guidance, develop the characteristics of empathy and understanding – qualities integral within a cohesive society.

This research proposes that the challenge to educate the whole person is situated within the social and political reality of globalisation: “We cannot ignore the promises of globalization nor its risks, not the least of which is the risk of forgetting the unique character of individual human beings” (p. 17). This perspective speaks to the core of education to form whole human beings in the lifelong educative process. This universal right to education was affirmed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) and more specifically elaborated in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). The significance of Article 29 is relevant for this study as it encapsulates the aspiration to ensure the dignity and full rights of every child and the integral role of education in the achievement of this aim.

The Report to UNESCO of the *International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century* supports the role of education as developing an awareness of self and environment and the imperative of promoting social responsibility at work and in the community (Delors, 1996a). Specifically, the report to UNESCO outlines four pillars as the foundation of education: Learning to Know; Learning to Do; Learning to Be; and Learning to Live Together. The fourth pillar, Learning to Live Together has significance for this research as it advocates “developing an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values” (Delors, p.22). For educators committed to the cultivation of this kind of cultural understanding in order to strengthen the pillar of ‘Learning to Live Together’, it would “induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way” (1996a, p. 22).

Reaffirming the vision of the global movement for Education for All, initiated in 1990 at the World Conference on Education (OHCHR, 1990), the *Incheon Declaration: Education 2030* (UNESCO, 2015) asserts that education is essential for “peace, tolerance, human fulfilment and sustainable development”. The declaration sets out a vision “to transform lives

through education” (p. 7), that is inclusive and leading to the promotion of democracy and human rights. The commitment to sustainable development relies on quality and equitable education for all that enhances global citizenship, tolerance and civic engagement. Education is argued to play an important role in mediating intercultural dialogue fostering respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity towards the achievement of justice and social cohesion (p. 26). In its guidelines on Intercultural Education, UNESCO asserts the imperative to provide opportunities for dialogue between different cultural groups “to go beyond passive coexistence to (develop) a sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between different cultural groups” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 18).

Successive national declarations of educational goals have profiled a set of desirable values for attention guiding the obligations of school education in Australia. The Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019b) re-states and elaborates the goals of education as articulated in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and sets out to guide educators in the design and delivery of teaching and learning. The second goal of the Melbourne Declaration articulates that “All young Australians become active and informed citizens” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9). The purpose of schooling as preparation for employment in the twenty-first century is highlighted recognising that proficiency in interacting socially and interdisciplinary thinking are key skills for consideration. The Melbourne Declaration submits that, “as well as knowledge and skills, a school’s legacy to young people should include the national values of democracy, equity and justice, and personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience and respect for others” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9). This elaboration highlights the centrality of personal and shared values and the obligation of schools to give attention to this aspect of schooling. The Melbourne Declaration is contextualised more broadly with a recognition of the changing nature of international relations due to the forces of globalisation and resultant global integration and international mobility. Thus, in conversation about social cohesion, students will establish the parameters of the society to which they are referring, examining social cohesion in various societal contexts, for example, metropolitan regions as a society, Australian society, or the global society.

Echoes of international and national sentiment related to the multidimensional purpose of education are expressed in local contexts, for example in the *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: An Overview* as produced by the Victorian Department of

Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2008). A vision for reform is set out to build and sustain inclusive and participative school communities which prepare learners to contribute to their local and global communities. The Blueprint highlights the imperative to enhance the engagement of students being attuned to their wellbeing and encouraging a sense of belonging, while at the same time promoting a socially cohesive community enriched by diversity (Victorian DEECD, 2008).

## **1.2 Research Context: Values Education Initiative**

A national policy agenda informed the development of the values reform in Australian education. The first formal and nationalised schools-based values education program was introduced to Australian schools in 2003 by the Commonwealth Government Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST], (2003). Prompting this reform, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), had asserted in 2002 “that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills” (DEST, 2005, p. 1, s. 2). This determination arose from an extensive consultation process by the Curriculum Corporation on behalf of the Commonwealth Government and involved all key education stakeholders across Australian states and territories. The purpose of the process was to establish the best methods to foster values in Australian schools and, subsequently, to make recommendations on a set of principles and a framework for promoting improved values education in all Australian schools.

At a system level, the Australian Government played a pivotal role in initiating, implementing and sustaining values based educational reform in Australian schools. The reform was particularly significant because although cognitive learning leading to the development of key knowledge and skills had been previously in the foreground of curriculum policy and delivery, the domain of values education, incorporating a concern for personal and social learning, had been relatively overlooked. The extent to which reform had traction was a function of the working relationships between all the key groups. Statutory authorities, universities and all major stakeholders in school communities collaborated to implement the educational reform initiatives. The focus of this case is the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster (MIIC). This Cluster comprised five schools representing diverse faith and cultural backgrounds from the three education system sectors: Government, Independent and Catholic. The Cluster was one of 25 initiatives supported in the second phase of the national Values Education project (DEEWR, 2008).

### 1.3 A Focused Investigation of a Pedagogical Response

Among the different approaches to the implementation of a values-based education was Socratic Circles. Socratic Circles is a formal, structured discussion-based pedagogy and was the chosen approach to teaching, learning and demonstrating values by the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster (MIIC). In such an approach, learners employ purposeful reading and speaking strategies to enhance the expression of ideas, in this case related to values, conducive to promoting individual wellbeing and social cohesion among adolescents.

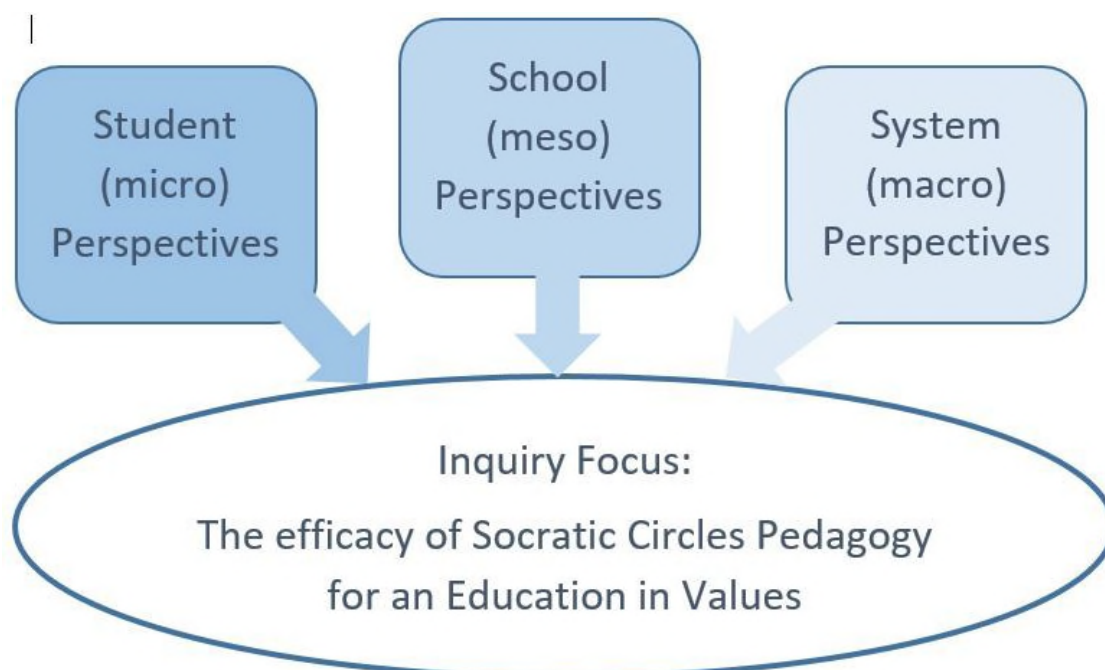
This research examines the pedagogical response to the values education reform effort implemented by the Commonwealth Government of Australia in the period 2002–2010. It focuses on the use of Socratic Circles as a pedagogical tool in teaching, understanding and demonstrating values in the context of adolescent learning in a cross-sectoral cluster of five diverse secondary schools in Melbourne, Australia. The central question driving the research design and conduct of the researcher is:

*To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?*

Socratic Circles Pedagogy (SCP) has been applied in various educational contexts (Brown, 2016; Thomas & Goering, 2018; Fisher & Machirori, 2019). However, there is limited analysis of the appropriateness of this dialogic method for achieving social and intellectual engagement. This research contributes an understanding of the pedagogical challenges of educational reform that coexist with the specific challenges of adolescent learning within a values framework. It explores the emerging issues and insights identified by participants at the three levels of educational development and delivery; system, school, and student. These participants at the macro, meso and micro levels of values education are reflective of the ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). In adapting this theoretical model, the macro, meso and micro influences on educational outcomes provide a frame for the exploration of participant perspectives in this research (see Figure 1.1). Critically within this adaptation, the role of the school personnel is conceptualised as a mesosystem due to their pivotal role in mediating the supports and mandates at the system level (that reflect and respond to community or governmental (exo) expectations) and their translation of such into pedagogical actions to meet stated goals.



**Figure 1.1** *The interrelated levels of inquiry.*



This research adopted qualitative methodological approaches within a three-phase progressive research plan. A case study methodology alongside a Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000) is considered most appropriate for achieving the core aims of addressing the central research question. In seeking to answer the research question, this study:

- analyses and documents the approaches to the teaching of values adopted in the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster (MIIC);
- examines the role of the Commonwealth and State governments, statutory authorities, school administrators, teachers, parents and students in implementing educational reform through the Values Education Project; and,
- investigates the applicability of Socratic Circles as a pedagogical approach for issues of sociocultural significance, especially among adolescents.

The collection of data across a three-phase integrated and progressive research program was conducted within the implementation of the *National Values Education Project*. The project allowed the researcher to identify the requisite features for educational reform to maximise sustainability, particularly in the field of values education. It also allowed for a

determination of the extent to which the aims of the project continued to have currency beyond the funded *National Values Education Project*.

#### **1.4 Significance**

The research is significant in that it was designed to contribute to an understanding of both the broader challenges of educational reform and to the specific challenges of adolescent learning within a values framework. As yet, there has been only limited analysis of Values Education as a reform initiative and of Socratic Circles as a dialogic method. The investigation of the method used by the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster as part of the Australian Government's *Values Education Good School Practice Project* identifies the applicability of this approach for an education in values.

An underlying assumption of the study is that learners need to be taught the conventions of formal conversation. The practice of discussion gives students opportunities to develop the ability to articulate their ideas and understanding of concepts using formal Standard Australian English as outlined in the Australian and Victorian Curriculums (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2018; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2018). The applicability of the Socratic Circles as a pedagogical tool for engaging adolescents in classroom discussion is significant as adolescence is characterised by change, and students in their middle years of secondary schooling often have a tendency to disengage from the educative process. Many educators find it exceedingly challenging to engage young people in classroom discussion, particularly when relying on traditional pedagogy. The Socratic Circles discussion framework is an example of a powerful pedagogy promoting equitable participation (Copeland, 2005), and aligns with contemporary understandings of the characteristics of deep thinking and learning (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018).

The creation of dynamic, diverse learning communities was one of the aims of *The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (DEST, 2005). The collaboration was motivated by a desire for knowledge and understanding. In a departure from usual interschool interaction which is characterised by competition, Values Education school clusters worked together for the purpose of learning from and with others in peaceful interaction. The extent to which the use of clusters or learning communities has been effective will be of benefit in the implementation of educational reform in the future. This study seeks to confirm the efficacy of Socratic Circles Pedagogy (SCP) for teaching, learning and demonstrating values.

## 1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 presents a brief organisational overview of the study and the context from which the key research question emerged.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in relation to the enduring and evolving aims of education. This chapter investigates key issues relating to Socratic pedagogies and the relevance of these to a consideration of an education in values. The chapter will investigate the sources of knowledge regarding dialogicality and democratic educational settings.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological principles underpinning this study. It will provide a rationale for the use of case study methodology, outline the research methods, and study design. Chapter 3 will also present a summary of the techniques used in data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the research results.

Chapter 4 is the first of three chapters that constitute the data collection, results and analysis. It presents an overview of the MIIC project case, the focus of the study.

Chapter 5 presents in greater detail the results and analysis of the semi-structured interviews with each grouping of participants at the macro, meso and micro levels of inquiry.

Chapter 6 gives a detailed discussion of the results and the key themes that emerged from analyses. In this chapter a new mechanism is introduced as a result of analysis, the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework, an integrative approach to transformational dialogue.

Chapter 7 involves a wider discussion of the emerging themes and implications of the results of this research. The chapter presents a summary of the study and identifies the key sites of interest for further research opportunities.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

In contemporary times, education seeks new and creative ways of engaging young people in learning experiences which are meaningful and make a difference in the world. Teachers' demands stretch beyond the traditional domains of learning to include broader educational and societal issues addressed in areas such as values education. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the themes related to the endeavour of values education and innovative pedagogy in light of the literature. Furthermore, this chapter provides a context in which the research question can be explored. The review of the literature identifies the core issues that relate to the purpose of this research and establishes the key gaps in research related to these core issues.

The central research question focuses on the efficacy of Socratic Circles Pedagogy for values education with adolescent learners. Within the context of the relevant educational, socio-cultural and theoretical literature and attentive to the central research question: *To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?* the following themes are examined:

1. The enduring and evolving aims of education;
  - a. global and local contexts reflecting an increasing polarisation of ideologies leading to conflicts within communities;
  - b. educational reform efforts in values, moral and character education;
2. The theory of dialogicality and applied Socratic pedagogy in the democratic classroom;
  - a. the rights of students to participate, engage and exercise agency in personal, educational, and social development; and
  - b. adolescent learning for intercultural capability towards social cohesion.

### 2.1 The Enduring and Evolving Aims of Education

This section provides an examination of the enduring and evolving aims of education. The assumption is that this literature identifies and contextualises key teaching and learning insights which inform an appreciation of Socratic Circles Pedagogy. Reference is made to documents of universal significance in their articulation of the entitlement to education for every child. International, national and local perspectives and policies are considered along with mainstream educational literature throughout this review.

### 2.1.1 *Philosophies of Education*

The seminal work of John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), articulates the characteristics of a democratic society and applies this understanding to the nature and place of education. Dewey contends that communication is the primary mode of transmission in education, and that through communication, experience is shared and becomes meaningful. Within this process the disposition of the participants (1916, p. 6) can constitute a transformative element within the teaching learning process.

For Dewey, education is a fostering, nurturing and cultivating process. The terminology used is growth-based as Dewey argues that the conditions of the educational environment are naturally social and developmental. In this light, the learner develops the attitudes and dispositions necessary for a productive life in society through the “intermediary of the environment” (1916, p. 22), that is to say, the experience of learning is a socially constituted experience.

Dewey’s proposition that individuals and groups need guidance, and that by participation in joint learning experiences all learners grow in their knowledge, understanding and social capacity, has enduring significance. Moreover, in Dewey’s description of education as growth, he explores the realm of habits. Furthermore, his contention (1916) that the measure of the value of school education is the extent to which it creates in learners the desire for continued growth and the means to enable that growth is relevant. He states:

Active habits involve thought, invention, and initiative in applying capacities to new aims. They are opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth. Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself. (Dewey, 1916, Part 4, Summary)

In an earlier and associated work on education, *How We Think*, Dewey (1910) registers a concern with “a multiplication of studies each in turn having its own multiplication of materials and principles” (1910, p. iii). A contemporary appreciation of Dewey’s observation is the problem of the crowded curriculum (Jensen & Kennedy, 2014; Splitter, 2006), with multiple content demands leading to an emphasis on teaching to the test rather than developing deep learning, (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018) and general capabilities (ACARA, 2010). Dewey argued for simplification, for a “steadying and centralising” (1910, p. iii) focus on a scientific habit of thought; one that responds to the native and unspoiled attitude of childhood, marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination and love of experimental inquiry. Dewey advanced strong connections with these characteristics and “the attitude of the scientific mind”

(1910, p. iii). He advocated for the educative value of reflective thought and integrated perspectives and elaborated thus:

Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence – a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome... Each phase is a step from something to something—technically speaking, it is a term of thought. The successive portions of the reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley. (Dewey, 1910, pp. 3–4)

The concept of learning as being a process of engagement and integration presents as significant in a contemporary context with student agency and diversity. Teacher moderation of the learner experience ensures relevance of education connected to individualised student needs. Dewey maintained that education needs to transform “natural tendencies into trained habits of thought” (1910, p. 26). This he argued would “fortify the mind against irrational tendencies current in the social environment” (1910, p. 26). Some elements essential to thought and processes of integration were described thus:

Thinking involves the suggestion of a conclusion for acceptance, and also search or inquiry to test the value of the suggestion before finally accepting it. This implies (a) a certain fund or store of experiences and facts from which suggestions proceed; (b) promptness, flexibility and fertility of suggestions; and (c) orderliness, consecutiveness, appropriateness in what is suggested. (Dewey, 1910, p. 30)

The educational priorities outlined by Dewey (1910), provide an enduring backdrop to the process of values education in contemporary times. However, Dewey cautions about the pervasive influence of external forces on the teacher’s ability to focus, “upon the training of mind” (1910, p. 59). Dewey refers to the perceived ideal of the product and the emphasis “to get pupils to recite their lessons correctly” (1910, p. 59). The same pressure exists today. The preoccupation with the perceived important high-stakes summative testing drives educational institutions to prioritise the score result as representative of achievement over complex learning processes and outcomes conducive to deep thinking and learning (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016).

Complementing the enduring works of Dewey, the insights of Immanuel Kant provide a basis for understanding the potential of pedagogical approaches in support of values education. In his central work on education, *Lectures on Pedagogy* (Kant, 2009) Kant acknowledges that while education involves some training and conditioning, it is built upon the concept that what really matters is that individuals learn to think and “make good use” of their freedom (Kant, 2009, p. 259). In this light, the role of teacher becomes highlighted, a role that

Kant characterised as an art, “the practice of which must be perfected over the course of many generations” (Louden, 2002, p. 54). Generations build upon the knowledge of the previous generations and contribute to an education leading humanity towards its vocation (Kant, 2009, p. 256).

A synopsis of Kant’s philosophy of education by Louden (2011) highlights education as a process of developing within students the realisation of their “inherent human powers and capacities” (Louden, 2011, p. 141). This is the growth of freedom. It is a focus on education by Kant as a skill-centred process which enables liberation and is borne out in the right of every child to an education as enshrined in Article 28 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) and articulated specifically in Article 29 (1), which states that;

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
  - (a) the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
  - (b) the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
  - (c) the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
  - (d) the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; and
  - (e) the development of respect for the natural environment. (United Nations, 1989).

The significance of Article 29 has been documented by the research arm of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2001). The five subparagraphs of Article 29 express collectively the desire for the realisation of the dignity and full rights of every child and the role that education plays in bringing this aspiration to fruition. Importantly, Article 29 does not merely address a child’s right to access education but reflects the importance of the content of education to guide and support a child to respond to the inevitable challenges of exponential change driven by new technologies and rapid globalisation. Such challenges are identified in

*Learning: The Treasure Within*, (Delors, 1996b) the seminal report to the UNESCO as including:

The tensions between...the global and the local; the individual and the collective; tradition and modernity; long- and short-term considerations; competition and equality of opportunity; the expansion of knowledge and the capacity to assimilate it; and the spiritual and the material. (Delors, 1996b, pp. 16–18)

The challenge of education in addressing the collective and related tensions identified by Delors (1996b) intersects predictably with a values-laden educational experience. In seeking to respond, Article 29 provides guidance as to the underlying tone of inclusion and respect for one's own and others' cultural identities. The call is towards a balanced approach which requires reconciling diverse values through a dialogical approach (UNICEF, 2001). The assumption that "Children are capable of playing a unique role in bridging many of the differences that have historically separated groups of people from one another" (UNICEF, 2001, Article 4), becomes significant, and confirms the transformative potential that education holds to create change for social cohesion.

Article 29 of the UNCRC highlights the progressive and cumulative intentions of education and the community responsibility for the education experience and supports the protections (physical punishment) and provisions (access) stated in Articles 23, 28 and 37. In essence, Article 29 reveals the whole-of-community's duty for the child's education. By referencing children's school participation through the criteria identified in Article 29, more practical, educationally relevant and effective adherence to the whole UNCRC can occur. Additionally, implicit in Article 29 are the imperatives of Voice-Inclusive Practice (Sargeant, 2018) which support the best interests of the child principled in Article 3. By anchoring practice to Article 29, the visible actioning of the child's education rights is more likely.

The UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) elaborates the right to "express views freely" (Article 12); "the right to freedom of expression [...] to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds" (Article 13) and to "freedom of thought" (Article 14). This broad statement of educational possibilities has been described as "being able to have access to and participate in dialogue is a basic freedom and an essential element of a democratic life" (Cam, 2000, p. 10). Accordingly, education can be understood to be multidimensional in purpose to allow young people to develop all aspects of self. This universal right to education was affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) as "Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory" (Article



26, No. 1). Notwithstanding the free and compulsory provision of elementary education, the developmental stage of adolescence is characterised by change and demands of educators a consideration of the most effective learning activity and environment to respond to the needs of adolescents as a distinct group of learners. In this regard, Dewey's advocacy of quality educational experiences that have a high impact and are memorable and transferable is especially critical for adolescent learners. He emphasised the significance of experiential education and provided a distinctive focus in the following way:

It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience. Everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had. The quality of any experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is obvious and easy to judge. The effect of an experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the educator. It is his [sic] business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his [sic] activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. (Dewey, 1938, p. 16)

Dewey explained the principle of the continuity of experience or what may be called the experiential continuum realising “that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1938, p. 16).

Paolo Freire provides a profound narrative about education as having a “dialogical character” (1993, p. 66) which allows the practice of freedom. He sees the potential of education, through the pedagogical choices of the teacher, to transform and enhance humanity (1993). Freire offers an insight into critical thinking as an essential element of the experiential undertaking of true dialogue asserting that it cannot exist:

unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation....Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. (1993, pp. 65–66)

Contemporary educational philosophies encompass the enduring themes of significant educational thought. The lasting contribution to educational philosophies by John Dewey,

Immanuel Kant and Paulo Freire provide an important foundation of understanding to situate and interpret contemporary educational thinking. Dewey gave significance to experiential education encouraging experimental inquiry and the role of the teacher as moderator of the learner experience. Kant articulated the transformational potential of education to advance the growth of freedom. Freire further added to the insight of co-construction in the learning process and the agency of the teacher and student as being responsible and responsive to each other thus: “Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them” (Freire, 1993, p. 50). Significantly, international treaties such as the UNCRC (UN, 1989) echo these enduring waves of educational philosophy. The enduring philosophies of education do not stand alone but contribute to the consolidation of a body of theory which reflects quality education within a contemporary period.

### **Philosophies of education in contemporary practice**

The *Teacher Education for the Future Project* (TEFP, Conner & Greene, 2006) investigated the purposes of teacher education to inform the future role of teachers in preparing students to become better global citizens. The comparative study involved teachers from Fiji, Korea, New Zealand, the United States and Latvia. The research concluded that teachers thought the aims of education should include the development of life-skills, content or academic knowledge, the ability to think critically and make decisions and nurture positive societal values, resulting in the development of the whole child (Conner & Greene, 2006). In addition, Power, Southwell and Elliot (2007) concluded that the purpose of education was to “help students develop knowledge about themselves and the world and to become a contributing, valued member of society” (p. 3). Such a position reinforced Townsend and Otero’s position (1999) that in a globalised world of learning, curriculum would promote and encourage the relational aspects of being human and be less concerned with specific content.

The position identifies an expansion in the focus of education. There exists an acute shift in the way nations think in relation to student academic outcomes. Student achievement is no longer in and of itself a personal pursuit but seen as part of the national collective to be representative of the health and success of the nation’s combined intellectual capital (Tröhler, 2014). Such a shift is in contrast with an internationally competitive educational climate where the primacy of academic outcomes, particularly as they relate to the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy, drives a preoccupation with standardised testing (Biesta, 2015).

The shift from an emphasis on academic outcomes, in accord with the aims of education (UNICEF, 2001), would mean that learners are recognised as not simply passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in the learning process. The paradigm of a student-centred curriculum in which students have agency and responsibility in their learning is recorded internationally:

The exercise of democratic citizenship, for example, is not dictated by orders or instructions from the education authorities, but grows out of the atmosphere in the classroom and the school, the forum in which students are encouraged and permitted to express their views, appreciate the freedom to think for themselves and respect the views of others. (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2004)

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2008) issued a recommendation for the promotion of a culture of democracy and human rights through teacher education recognising a key aim of both primary and secondary education to prepare children for living in a democratic society. The Parliamentary Assembly further highlighted that “School is not only a place of knowledge sharing and knowledge transmission, but also an institution which prepares for active citizenship, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion” (2008, s. 5.14). Young people should be enabled through structured learning opportunities to experience the exercising of their democratic values and principles. Schools have a role to play in both teaching about democratic principles and values and demonstrating these through practices and procedures (MCEETYA, 2008, pp. 4–5). The side-event of the first forum on *Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law; Widening the Democratic Space: The Role of Youth in Public Decision-making* (United Nations Council of Human Rights [UNHRC], 2016), prioritised the democratic participation of youth requiring “significant investment in strengthening youth competencies to engage more efficiently and meaningfully in such process” (United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, 2016). This follows from the principles of human rights education set out by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in *5. Plan of Action for the first phase (2005–2007) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education* (2004) where “educational activities within the world programme shall: ... Make use of participatory pedagogies that include knowledge, critical analysis and skills for action furthering human rights” (I. C. 8[g]) and “Be relevant to the daily life of the learners, engaging them in a dialogue about ways and means of transforming human rights from the expression of abstract norms of the reality of their social, economic, cultural and political conditions” (I. C. 8[i]).

The place of student engagement within the construction of the learning process is articulated as the concept of student agency or student voice. Lundy (2007) provides a critique of the concept of *pupil voice* in relation to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (United Nations, 1989, Article 12, Parts 1 & 2).

Lundy (2007) asserts that reductive phrases such as ‘pupil voice’ do not fully represent the extent of the obligation that is enshrined in Article 12 as “the practice of actively involving pupils in decision-making should not be portrayed as an option which is in the gift of adults but a legal imperative which is the right of the child” (p. 931). The Lundy model for a comprehensive conceptualisation of Article 12 comprises four interrelated elements:

- Space: children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: the view must be listened to
- Influence: the view must be acted upon, as appropriate (2007, p. 933).

Demonstration of this right requires an assurance, a proactivity to encourage the child to express their views (Lundy, 2007, p. 934). The importance of canvassing a diverse range of children so that the process does not privilege the more capable students is underscored (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004, p. 137). In summary, Lundy (2007) captures the importance of due attention to Article 12 in noting that “the strongest argument for guaranteeing the implementation of this right derives from its capacity to harness the wisdom, authenticity and currency of children’s lived experience to effect change” (p. 940).

The UNCRC prompted a revision of the role of teacher from that of lecturer to facilitator (Hammarberg, 1997). Student-centred teaching is characterised by a facilitative relationship between teacher and student whereby the teacher engages with each student where they are in their learning and responds with effective and well-timed instruction to maximise students’ potential for success in achieving their learning goals. The teacher-student conversation in the

classroom shapes the learner's development of communication skills for life-long learning. The teacher-student relationship is significant and the impact of positive relationships between teachers and students on student motivation has been well-documented (Hattie, 2012, pp. 157–158). The technical proficiency of the teacher in knowing the content and how to teach it is another crucial factor for student inclusion and achievement of potential (AITSL, 2015). More recently, as an authentic manifestation of the UNCRC, the concept of voice-inclusive practice has been developed which promotes the empowerment of children to articulate their views and influence the provision of their own education (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015).

Progressive research reveals the value of student voice in promoting relevance and deep engagement with learning and speaks more directly to the expectations of the educational process by governments and system authorities. There is a congruence between the review of the National Goals for Schooling (Education Council, 2019a), and the educational priorities of the *Six Global Competencies* (Fullan et al., 2018). The six competencies: character; citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking, are asserted to be the skills and attributes required for learners to “flourish as citizens of the world” and deep learning is said to be the process by which these skills and attributes are acquired (2018, p. 16). The movement supporting students as agentic in their own learning is further evidence that a shift in recognising student voice is more fully realised in the international field. Student voice as integral to the learning process is confirmed but warrants consideration equally in the wider educational process that recognises teacher identity and competency operative within variable school communities and environments with their unique and often particular emphases.

Whilst student voice is therefore significant, so too is the importance of understanding teacher identity and local school mission. A study that informs this question is that of Sultmann and Brown (2019) in which the variables of teacher identity are coupled with school mission in light of student agency. The conclusions of the paper reinforce the importance of relationships which are in a continuous process of engagement and learning encounter which in their fullest form reinforce agency, equity and authenticity for both teacher and learner. Agency is seen in exercising voice by both teacher and learner; equity is evidenced in inclusive practices which are responsive to the rights and needs of every learner; and authenticity is represented in the particular understanding of the human person and the school's intention to educate in this light. Important to the quality of relationship of agency, equity and authenticity are the roles of dialogue and identification of pedagogical processes that maximise this intention.

## 2.2 Dialogue and the Development of a Socratic Culture in Learning

In “Doctrine of the Method of Ethics”, Kant advocates a pedagogical method described as “erotematic” because of its derivation from the Greek *eromai* (to ask or inquire) (Louden, 2009, p. 288). This pedagogical teaching method of inquiry involves question and answer as opposed to lecture style. Students take an active participatory role in the dialogue, questioning their teachers and formulating their own responses. This is inquiry-based dialogue that requires teachers to choose the form and structure of lessons but not the content (Freakley & Burgh, 2000). The teacher is at times expert and at other times co-inquirer who models and scaffolds the protocols and processes of the structure and draws out the skills of the learners through complex and varied activities (Howells & McArdle, 2007). Dewey continues to influence educators in relation to reflective education, which connects thinking, dialogue and inquiry bringing elements of democracy to the classroom (Nottingham et al., 2017, p. 1)

The capabilities of an inquiring community of learners include “listening attentively to others, responding to ideas and not the person, openness to consider alternatives, being prepared to challenge ideas and have ideas challenged, as well as asking questions, exploring disagreements and making links between ideas” (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 47). Engagement in self- and peer reflection, or meta-dialogue, can lead to consolidation of ideas emerging from or established in the dialogue and awareness of areas of growth for improvement in practice (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 48).

The process of active dialogue in educational practice is not new. Freire (1985) explains that dialogue “is not an empty instructional tactic but a natural part of the process of knowing” (1985, p. 15). The *Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy* by UNESCO (2009) articulates the critical importance of an education which encourages “dialogue, analysis and questioning of contemporary society” (2009, p. 9) and fosters “critical reflection and independent thinking” (2009, p. 12) underpinned by a belief that thinking is freedom, intrinsically linked with the basic rights of the child.

Given the focus of education to create competent thinking and active citizens for democratic society (MCEETYA, 2008), learning processes involve ethical questions and concerns regarding rights, responsibilities and the way we live (ACARA, 2010; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1998). Considering Dewey’s work in this regard (1916), Simpson and Hull (2011) note that “a democratic society depends in significant ways on teachers recognizing and promoting democratic ethical values, and these include the free exchange of controversial ideas” (p. 8). Moreover, within the philosophy espoused by Kant (2009), the student is an active agent in the

learning process. The literature also informs an understanding of the potential for teachers to be agents of democracy through innovative and democratic pedagogy. Teachers who are “Activators” (Hattie, 2012), by challenging and scaffolding learners; “Culture Builders” building connection, establishing norms and shaping culture (Fullan et al, 2018, p. 69); and “Collaborators” in the co-design of learning with students (2018, p. 69) support student agency. Several drivers for student voice are identified by Whitty and Wisby (2007), one of which is the active citizenship driver which emphasises the potential of student voice to support the preparation for citizenship and democracy.

Integral to active citizenship, the concept of engagement is captured by John Dewey (1938) as “an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (p. 5). Dewey contends that an emphasis on quality educational experience is elemental and stressed the significance of the interactive and social processes of learning. Accordingly, the role of the teacher is not “to inculcate or use ‘transmission pedagogies’ but rather to structure possibilities for students to become/learn/act” (Dewey, 1916, p. 97). “The teacher’s role...is concerned with the structure of experiences. It is also to foster conversations about experiences and activities that are challenging, problematic, engaging and horizon-stretching” (Thomson, 2007, p. 783). In this regard, a contemporary view is that “the teacher’s role is directive and organizational providing the structure to enable a focused conversation but remain outside the argument itself” (Brune, 2004, p. 161).

The significance of dialogue within educational experiences draws from a rich tradition. Notwithstanding that there is no written text ascribed to the Greek philosopher Socrates, he has been called the “patron saint of philosophers ... who claimed that the only way in which he surpassed others in wisdom was that he was aware of his own ignorance” (Kenny, 2006, p. 13). This belief about himself led Socrates to understand dialogue as critical in a deep search for truth. It is his theory of knowledge about learning through disciplined conversation, Socratic thinking and dialogue, and more recently Socratic Circles, which have been applied within the teaching and learning process (Copeland, 2005). Socrates accepted the limitations of human thinking, but also strongly believed that within each being was an often-untapped reservoir of understanding and knowledge. Cicero, Roman orator and politician, is said to have remarked of Socrates that he “brought philosophy down from the heavens and established it in households and the marketplace” (Kaplan, 2009, p. 201). Centuries later, the ‘Socratic method’ is that practice whereby students are introduced to the close “analysis and application of general rules and concepts” (2009, p. 201).

Socratic questioning, as an interpretation of the Socratic method, is the name given to the more general methodology of moving through thought and questions to arrive at a deeper, more rational and logical level of thinking (Copeland, 2005, p. 7). Only through purposeful, skilful questioning can the learner move beneath surface meaning. The pedagogical challenge rests in that with most classroom discourse, conversations are answer-focused, rather than question-focused. As stated by Elder and Paul (1998): “Questions define tasks, express problems, and delineate issues. Answers, on the other hand, often signal a full stop in thought. Only when an answer generates a further question does thought continue its life as such” (1998, p. 297), cultivating the “dynamic impulse ...to ask and then use the answer to frame another question” (Johnson, 2011, p. 78) to extend and deepen thinking.

The importance to effective teaching of the skill of questioning encompasses multiple pedagogical indicators including “question frequency; question distribution; how responses to questions are dealt with (by teachers and students); individual/group directed questions; teacher/student generated questions; question types (for example, open/closed; factual/thinking; convergent/divergent; evaluative; higher-order); and questioning techniques (for example, Socratic)” (Loughran, 2010, p. 4). This questioning continuum culminates in the most sophisticated question type: Socratic.

The theory of learning which underpins Socratic pedagogy is predicated upon a basic idea of democracy and has been part of the enduring educational language summarised by Glickman (1998) and echoing important educational principles advanced by aforementioned educational theorists, Dewey, Kant and Freire:

All humans are capable of educating themselves when provided with an environment that allows them to participate actively with knowledge. The result of such participation is that individuals would grasp the accepted knowledge of the day: be able to challenge, critique, and deliberate upon it; and, eventually be able to form their own judgments and conclusions. (Glickman, 1998, p. 17)

Learning strategies that draw on the principles and practices of Socratic dialogue are examples of what Glickman (1998) described as democratic pedagogies, as processes which comprise, “a set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution” (p. 18). Moreover, Gerzon (1997) asserted that “education for citizenship in a democracy cannot happen in an artificially conflict-free environment...a generation of students will learn these skills only if educators enable them to encounter situations that require using them” (p. 9). Learners preparing for full citizenship in a



democracy are therefore ideally supported to develop the skills of civil discourse, respectful disagreement and criticism and appropriate resignation of ideas where applicable.

The question as to what it means “to be an agent in the world” (Eryaman, 2007, p. 18) prompts educators to consider the kinds of pedagogies which advance learning and skill development necessary for participation in classroom dialogue and in the community. Preparing young learners for difficult conversations either related to conflict or leading to conflicting ideas requires clear purpose and structure (Forrest, 2009), and an attempt to “reduce the fear and anxiety of individuals and, thereby, encourage silenced voices to engage in dialogues that are essential in democratic institutions and societies” (Simpson & Hull, 2011, p. 7).

Dialogue involving sensitive ethical issues can be difficult to initiate due to the subject matter which is often laden with, “controversial assumptions, delicate nuances, personal sensitivities, problematic arguments, cultural issues and religious controversies” (Simpson & Hull, 2013, p. 90). The challenge facing teachers facilitating and guiding classroom dialogue around sensitive moral questions, is to create a balance between pedagogical structures that avoid being, either “overly controlled” or “undisciplined” (Freire, 2005, p. 81).

Communication styles vary according to cultural and community norms. Research shows that there is a multitude of communication genres with variance in expectations related to turn-taking, interruptions, formality, more or less narrative or combative in nature (Hudicourt-Barnes & Ballenger, 2008; Rogoff, 2003). The aspiration of multicultural forms of communication is to allow all voices to be heard negating the domination of any style towards an authentic, inclusive communication (Kirshner & Jefferson, 2015).

In an era that is described as being post-truth (Flood, 2016), where ubiquitous newsfeeds are competing with an unfettered social media commentary favouring the sound bite over investigative journalism, education provides the potential as an environment for deep learning, skilled analysis and considered critique. In this context more specifically, for the adolescent learner who experiences social diversity and the challenge of formulating personal identity, integrating the identification of appropriate pedagogies towards deep learning becomes more pronounced. Socratic pedagogies enable the creative and critical elements for this collaborative thinking and truth-searching. Davey Chesters (2012) advocates for an engagement with the Socratic method, “considered to be a prime example of philosophy which is dialogical in terms of its literal form and dialectic in structure which does not lack a constructive or a creative element simply because its intended purpose is to discover truth” (p. 165). Amir (2001)

describes this dialogue as colloquy meaning “a joint communicative activity with the goal of discovering truth” (p. 239).

An inability to think adequately for oneself, to think effectively about life, is being *insocratic*; that is, just as one might refer to individuals as being illiterate or innumerate (Cam, 2006), there exists the potential for students to be limited in their ability to learn and engage in social discourse through dialogue. While there is a proliferation of debate in contemporary public discourse, as Lindop (2002) identifies, “Debate is something that occurs between antagonists and adversaries and its goal is to win an argument” (p. 36). Dialogue, however, offers a collaborative counterpoint to the genre of debate which is characteristically oppositional and myopic. Where combatants in a debate aim to sustain their position throughout, dialogic agents consider all positions and reflect on opportunities for synthesis (Cam, 2006, pp. 44–45).

For adolescents in and outside of classroom environments there are possible benefits of participation in “joint communicative activity” or “colloquy” web-based dialogue, sometimes referred to as “delayed dialogue” (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 30). Such dialogic platforms increase the accessibility across time and location allowing for more and more flexible participation and increased reflective and preparation time for distilling thoughts and gathering evidence for claims (Kirk & Orr, 2003). There is some optimism about the possibilities that digital technologies and online spaces and communities present to democratise knowledge and expand dialogue:

The digital age we are living in allows the knowledge to enter the market more efficiently than ever, and the cyber-transparency has provided people more possibilities to attain and spread the knowledge. The new digital technologies have also created more democratic spaces for dialogue, along with e-learning possibilities they provide. (Kaya, 2016, p. 233)

Notwithstanding the possibilities for digital experiences for dialogue, caution is advised as the dispositions and capacities for reflective thinking in order to process the abundance of information available online still requires development (Davey Chesters, 2012). For instance, MacKnight (2000) also advocates for initial face-to-face dialogic interaction so that students can familiarise themselves with the “elements of an argument and thus how to interact with ideas and each other in a meaningful way” (p. 39). The role of the teacher is crucial as the teacher mediates critical evaluation of information and develops in their students the capacity to question and reason (Nussbaum, 2010). It is observed that “the idea of active learning which

usually includes a large commitment to critical thinking and argument... traces its roots back to Socrates" (2010, p. 18). In these instances, Socratic pedagogies can provide learning opportunities "to elicit immediate and responsive interaction among participants and between participants and the teacher" (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 29). The experience of Socratic dialogue practices for adolescent learners provides not only an established educational process but equally, prepares students to participate fully in a democratic society.

There is potential for Socratic pedagogy to be part of democratic education, because "in order to foster a democracy that is reflective and deliberative, rather than simply a marketplace of competing interest groups, a democracy that genuinely takes thought for the common good, we must produce citizens who have the Socratic capacity to reason about their beliefs" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 19). The promotion of applied theory of classrooms as microcosms of the world (Hawkes, 2007) enables democratic values that are esteemed and universally shared. Within the context of developing democratic classrooms for the formation of deliberative citizens, dialogue becomes integral to social, educative and developmental process (Davey Chesters, 2012).

The practice of dialogue in schools alone, while beneficial, does not utilise its potential to open to students a range of experiences not usually available in school. Engagement with community organisations can facilitate a wider integrated social and educative development. Some of the most effective school-community partnerships are mediated by "boundary spanning leaders" (Campbell & Erbsstein, 2012, p. 15), those who know the community and are able to work skilfully across generations, age groups and institutional sectors. In this context, Gregory (2002) argues that, to improve the quality and expanse of the inquiry, the role of teacher also resides in connecting students with communities of experts for authentic experiences such as experiments and field studies. Teachers can cultivate dialogic communities beyond the classroom.

The absence of "dialogical cultures that facilitate considered or educative discussions" (Simpson & Hull, 2011, p. 18) in schools and communities undermines potential leveraging of pedagogical encounters to support intellectual, emotional, ethical and democratic growth. (Simpson & Hull, 2011). Dialogue supports the common good in developing collaborative habits of thinking and behaviour that have potential positive impact on schools, communities, societies, nations and the world (Freire, 2005). However, cultivating reflective practice in relation to one's own ideological viewpoints to be self-aware and evaluative before teaching such dispositions is critical (Hess, 2009; McLaren & Farahmandpour, 2006).

The appropriate inclusion of Socratic pedagogy supports the development of adolescent learners in their appreciation of concepts, and their development of relationships. The process, whilst commenced within an educational immersion, has the potential to reach into community experience and thereby, through personal, group and community outcomes, becomes important to a wider national agenda. Educational initiatives that foster the National Goals for Schooling of which the Values Education project is one example, inform the development and refinement of values education coupled with rich pedagogy. A discussion of this initiative in light of National Goals for Schooling serves to reinforce its significance within an evolving and sustainable process of educational reform.

### **2.3 Australian Perspectives**

Australia was impacted by a changing culture of education in the 1980s reflecting an emerging global economy and exponential technological development. The decline of the West and emergence of other economic powers were attributed to their influence in relation to commodities, resources and trade (Holland, 1997; Townsend, 2002). A basic education was now a priority of highly populated industrial nations which were providing goods for the world's marketplace. The measurement of academic achievement, always a priority within nations, was now possible and desirable between nations (Townsend, 2002, p. 26). It was around this time that the focus on education moved again. Reports were distributed that suggested there was a link between "the quality of education that students received" and "global economic supremacy" (Townsend, 2002, p. 26).

Successive articulation of the National Goals for Schooling (MYCEETYA, 1999; 2008) have specified the purpose and goals of education along with the development of characteristics necessary for strong global citizenship. *The Adelaide Declaration, National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (MYCEETYA, 1999), promoted schooling that would support young Australians to contribute to Australia's social, cultural and economic development in local and global contexts (1999, Preamble). In a similar vein, *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MYCEETYA, 2008), set the direction for Australian schools for the period 2008–2018.

The Preamble to the Melbourne Declaration establishes the context and purpose for education that "as a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society, a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse" (MCEETYA, 2008, Preamble). There is an acknowledgement that schools play an essential role in "promoting social cohesion" and that they operate in a context of "global

integration” and “international mobility” which heightens “the need to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship” (MCYEETA, 2008, Preamble).

The second goal, developed in the Melbourne Declaration (MCYEETA, 2008), states that “All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens” (p. 8). In developing an understanding of this goal, successful learners are said to be “able to plan activities independently, collaborate, work in teams and communicate ideas” (MCYEETA, 2008, p. 8). The characteristics of active and informed citizens include an appreciation of the social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Australia; an ability “to relate to and communicate across cultures”; and be “responsible global and local citizens” (MCYEETA, 2008, p. 9). This intention seen in the establishment of these National Goals for Education confirmed a commitment to equity and excellence for all Australian children. This was expressed as a driving motivation for an education revolution which was foreshadowed by The Honourable Julia Gillard, the then federal Education Minister. Gillard reinforced national principles to ensure that “every child in every school receives an excellent education regardless of their background or the ethos or location of their school” (Gillard, 2009). The education revolution would be reflected in the injection of resources to fund numerous initiatives to support teaching and learning and address disadvantage.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) sets the direction and develops resources for school leaders and teachers to design and deliver quality school curriculum, assessment and reporting. Through the establishment of the Australian Curriculum, guidelines are set out according to Domains of learning and inter-related General Capabilities with detailed elaborations reflecting progressions of learning (ACARA, 2010).

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides support for school leaders and teachers at all stages of their professional engagement. AITSL has developed in collaboration with national and state education authorities and established an agreed set of leadership and teaching professional standards (AITSL, 2015). These standards are the key reference criteria for successful registration of teachers in Australia and are used routinely in formal and informal review processes in schools; in particular, the standards related to teacher content knowledge, knowledge of students’ progression of learning, and pedagogical choices, all of which are directly relevant to improved classroom practice in advancing identifiable domains of learning.

### *2.3.1 Establishing National Domains of Learning*

The term ‘national’ became ubiquitous as governments initiated, developed and disseminated: national goals for education and schooling; national standards of achievements and outcomes; national curriculum; and national testing (Tröhler, 2014). All such initiatives reflected a history of demonstrating outcomes against benchmarks within and beyond the national agenda. This paradigm shift had significance for the Australian education experience as standardised testing began to influence decision-making about curriculum and pedagogy (Polesel, Rice, & Dulfer, 2014). As a result, the purpose of education could be perceived as moving from the ideal of providing students with a well-rounded education to preparing them to succeed on the standardised test.

The tendency to frame discourse about education in terms of a comparative examination of measurable academic outcomes has been criticised (Biesta, 2015). A renewed conversation about the purpose of education to remind administrators and educators of the higher purpose of education to go beyond only measuring certain dimensions of success has attracted attention. The discussion focuses on the tension between valuing what we measure and measuring what we value. As noted by Tröhler (2014), the preoccupation with league tables which emerge within a measurement culture of educational outcomes is evidenced, together with a focus on international comparative studies popularly manifested in studies such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS); and OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

In contrast to a measurement orientation there is a re-engagement with the question about what constitutes a good education. Biesta (2009) regrets the fact that we seem to have lost sight of fundamental questions regarding values, and the purpose and goodness of an education. The role of values in quality teaching is underscored by Clement (2009) who advocates the engagement of students through a “positive dynamic interplay of intellect and affect” (p. 25).

With insight into a paradigm of change and taking into consideration the exponential rate of change predicted for the twenty-first century, Holland (1997) characterised the capabilities required by learners living in this time. He argues that rather than creating learning opportunities that result in students simply being able to receive and remember, students need to be fostered to be able to problem-solve, experiment with ideas and take risks. Bloom’s

taxonomy of educational objectives provides an enduring representation of the progressions in thinking, learning and capability (Bloom, 1956).

Even though a continuous debate about the purpose of education has included assertions consistently that schooling is for the preparation of future workforces, the importance of developing independence and personal growth, and to equip generations to contribute to the broader community has also been asserted (Widdowson, Dixon, Peterson, & Rubie-Davies, 2014). A tension persists as education is understood to serve the fulfilment of national goals as well as to satisfy the individual's own aspiration or for the individual's service to one's community (Widdowson et al., 2014).

A core aspect of education which addresses a more holistic approach incorporates the capacity of the student to educate the inner self (Hawkes, 2009, p. 110). Hawkes believes that without the affective domain of learning being given due attention, education can become, "a one-dimensional enterprise, merely concerned with achievement targets and outcomes such as league tables, SATs and external inspection" (2009, p. 110). Significant to the question under review will be not only the outcomes of the Values Education but commentary on the process and interactions that engaged this co-constructed, mutually enriching process.

### **2.3.2 National Capabilities**

Coupled with a new and emerging set of learning domains and an increasing awareness as witness to the expected outcomes of learning experience, it is in the teacher that the student can observe the integration of learning and through dialogue seek to understand and enact the demonstrative behaviour. The general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) and the iteration of those capabilities articulated in the *Victorian Curriculum: Foundation–10* (VCAA, 2016) highlight: ethical understanding, critical and creative thinking, personal and social learning, and intercultural understanding. These capabilities based on the National Curriculum, promote the development of adaptability and analytical thinking, the capacity to work collaboratively with others and an ability to transfer critical skills across subject areas to develop new understanding and further skills (VCAA, 2016). Considering the purpose and aspirations of education to inform, form, and transform the person, such declarations and documents sit before a backdrop of national political interests in a competitive international educational context (Biesta, 2015). In theory, there is the national will to equip students with the attitudes and dispositions required for substantive global citizenship but in real terms, the competitive agenda is said to more vividly reflect the academic imperative of

education (Tröhler, 2014). Successive Ministers for Education, operating within the Australian Education Council, have articulated a clear aspiration for greater emphasis of education to support students in expectations of good citizenship. This goal is particularly evidenced in government-supported initiatives which seek to provide practical means for addressing a challenging and universally integrated perspective of education (Wang, 2007).

### ***2.3.3 Values Education Initiatives: An Australian Historical Perspective***

Historically, the argument for schools to reflect upon and express their values more explicitly has been motivated by the following considerations:

- growing cultural diversity (and therefore diversity of values) within all western societies;
- a growing gulf between the values of government and teachers, ...which has led to a breakdown of trust and to stronger demands for accountability;
- the perceived moral decline not only among young people but also in public life; and
- the determination of government to uphold certain values, for example, by subjecting the contribution of schools to the spiritual and moral development of children to regular inspection (Halstead, 1996, p. 4).

An outcome of the consultation process undertaken by the Curriculum Corporation on behalf of the Australian Government was the identification of key values based on a high degree of agreement from participating schools and major stakeholders published in the final report of the Values Education Study in August 2003 (Curriculum Corporation [Australia] & DEST2003a). These values which were outlined in *A Draft National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*, were further developed and substantial government funds were earmarked for the developing initiative (DEST, 2003a).

The Values Education Study was subsequently published online (Curriculum Corporation & DEST, 2003b) and in conjunction with political discourse at the time, prompted public debate about broader educational issues in Australia, including: the nature and purpose of schooling; funding of school sectors; and political emphasis in teaching and curriculum in schools. The draft framework was disseminated to all schools in Australia for comment and further refinement, resulting in the publication of the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (DEST, 2005). This included the identification of the *Nine Values for Australian Schooling*. The specific values outlined were Freedom, Respect, Responsibility, Fair Go, Care and Compassion, Doing Your Best, Honesty and Trustworthiness, Integrity,



Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion (DEST, 2005). A sample of school clusters in three phases from 2004–2009 were supported by the Government with a funding budget of \$29.7 million to develop exemplars of teaching and learning about values. In addition, all schools across Australia were encouraged to integrate values education in their own contexts.

The first stage of the project during 2004–2005 had a general focus on the Nine Values for Australian Schooling, comprised 15 clusters of schools across both primary and secondary levels and involved participants from the three sectors of education: Government, Independent and Catholic. Clusters worked on a diverse range of teaching and learning projects in this initial stage. The outcome of this work is documented in the comprehensive report, *Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, 2006* (DEEWA, 2006). The second stage of the project developing an emphasis on intercultural understanding was conducted from 2006–2008 and entitled *Values Education Good Practice Schools* (Curriculum Corporation, 2008). The emphasis during this period was on those values which were aligned with active citizenship and participation within the school community and wider society. During this period, 25 clusters developed activities in response to the terms of reference outlined in the National Framework of Values Education. The experience and findings of this second stage are showcased in *At the Heart of What we do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling, 2008* (Curriculum Corporation, 2008). The third and final stage during 2009 entitled *Values in Action*, was a further development of the project and built upon the experience of the earlier stages with a focus on projects which linked with the community. It is documented in *Giving Voice to the Impacts of Values Education: The Final Report of the Values in Action Schools Project* (Education Services Australia, 2010). A variety of approaches were adopted by schools collaborating in clusters to implement values education according to their specific contexts and objectives.

The case for comprehensive values education within schools in the context of a democratic society is made by Aspin (2002) who advocated for values education which promotes moral, social, political and aesthetic values as essential elements of any educational program for citizenship in a democracy. The case for values education meets the needs for the development of autonomous individuals in society. Aspin observed that while the main motivation of curriculum delivery across countries is made up of “economic imperatives, the demands of technocratic rationality, and mechanistic versions of school effectiveness” (2002, p. 14), it is often to the detriment of those values he asserted as being of equal value. These include “moral awareness, interpersonal sensitivity and cross-cultural understanding” (Aspin,

2002, p. 14). A commitment to the promotion of these values in Aspin's terms requires an "induction of our young people into those modes of speech, realms of knowledge, and networks of interpersonal relations that constitute our lives as human beings" (2002, p. 14). Aspin and Chapman advocated that it is "within the democratic school that young people will receive the best possible preparation to take their place as mature and well-informed citizens of a participative democracy" (Aspin & Chapman, 2007, p. 31).

Any genuine engagement of young learners in the activity of democratic citizenship requires reference to the values, beliefs, assumptions and behaviours which are at the heart of social and political ideas and issues. Citizenship education is typically more than content knowledge about processes of government and information about casting votes. It is more to do with rights and the development of a meaningful system which allows for freedom and choice based on awareness and participation. It involves participation, deliberation and judgment in relation to intellectual, economic, social, aesthetic and recreational life (Henderson & Tudball, 2017).

Within the Australian context, democratic education allowed learners "to confront the diversity of opinion that surrounds them and to witness the conflicts that impinge on education" (Gerzon, 1997, p. 7). Democracies thrive on the values of respect, tolerance and a preparedness to learn from one another, and programs such as the *Discovering Democracy* national curriculum reform support the teaching and demonstration of these values (Curriculum Corporation. (Australia), 1998). In relation to the ways in which values education can be taught, Carr and Landon (1993) suggested three main forms: modelling and imitation, training and habituation, and enquiry and clarification. The formalised National Values Education program from 2002–2010 followed the *Discovering Democracy* civics and citizenship program as the most significant national initiative involving all state and territory education departments and sectors.

The dual and sometimes competing aims of education, to inform and form the person, creates at times a hierarchy of priorities. The resolution of the tension between a measurement-driven curricula with an emphasis on holistic development is evident in the work of Lovat & Toomey (2009) who adopted the double helix metaphor to characterise the interwoven links between quality teaching and values education. Quality teaching engenders in students the following capacities: intellectual depth; communicative competence; empathic character; capacity for reflection; self-management and self-knowledge (Lovat & Toomey, 2009, p. xviii). Intellectual depth encompasses the competencies of interpretation, communication, negotiation

and reflection, with a focus on self-management (Lovat & Toomey, 2009, p. 3). It is in the interaction and combination of these overall capabilities that values education finds its deepest expression of quality.

Explicit teaching of a values-based pedagogy that engages the whole person has consistently been advocated (Curtis, 2013; Lovat, Dally, Clement & Toomey, 2011). Pedagogy which encompasses aspects of values education can support the overarching aims of the Melbourne Declaration, through schools' promotion of "the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). In both national (Bereznicki, Brown, Toomey & Weston, 2008; Zbar & Toomey, 2006) and international (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn & Smith, 2006; Lovat, Toomey & Clement, 2010) contexts, research supports the benefits of values-based pedagogies which consider the holistic needs of the child.

In planning for values education in the school curriculum, Edwards (1996) advocated for appropriate pedagogies including the use of "circle time" (p. 175). This provides opportunities to share experiences and views in a supportive group discussion and such "discussions, where structured activities ranging from informal discourse following a particular agenda, to formal debate, form part of the learning process" (p. 176).

In a pluralist society, Parekh (1985) argued that multicultural education, an iteration of values education, is the "freedom from inherited biases and narrow feelings and sentiments as well as freedom to explore other cultures and perspective" (pp. 22–23). Values-based holistic pedagogy "has the potential to enable students to be more self-knowing, self-managing and reflective" (Toomey, Lovat, Clement & Dally, 2010, p. vii). Such are the characteristics of learning environments which exemplify democracy and give capacity to student agency and equity.

#### **2.4 Socratic Pedagogy within Democratic Learning Environments**

The UNESCO report, *Philosophy, a School of Freedom: Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize; Status and Prospects*, (2007) arising from a worldwide study on the teaching of philosophy and application of philosophical pedagogies of inquiry, prompted educators to design pedagogy that promotes higher order thinking. In this regard, Davey Chesters (2012) explored the potential of Socratic pedagogy to develop both the social and intellectual capacity of the learner in preparation for active citizenship within the context of a

democratic society based on the underlying assumption that there are appropriate pedagogies inextricably linked to the enabling democracy (Burgh, 2003; Cam, 2006; Lipman, 2003).

The democratic school which manifests a democratic curriculum framework promotes integration of competent citizens in a participatory democracy (Wood, 1998). In relation to critical literacy, the ‘Socratic method’ has been used to test students’ ability to explain and apply concepts in changed circumstances in consistent and coherent ways through questioning and “rigorous interrogation of teachers” (Kaplan, 2009, p. vii). Socratic methods privilege questioning, inquiry and evaluation. In addition, Socratic methods can promote thinking towards deeper cultural awareness building cultural capital. In the classroom, through the employment of Socratic methods of ever deeper levels of questioning, students are challenged to consider a multiplicity of perspectives or social alternatives. With regard to democratic values, Socratic methods entitle the participants engaged in dialogue to interrogate the realisation of equality and community and, through the process of communication, experience equality and community.

In a similar vein, a democratic classroom consists of several key characteristics, according to Knight (2001):

It has a democratic authority within which the teacher is persuasive and prepared to negotiate; It operates centripetally, that is, it seeks to include rather than exclude, by pulling all students into the centre; It works with and on the production of important knowledge related to active social, economic, and cultural participation in communities and society more generally; It has a rights basis; It embraces the right to free expression, privacy, due process, and of movement; Participatory decision making is the norm; Equality is debated and practised.

There is an optimum environment for learning in which students can do the following: take risks; endure no unnecessary pain; make meaning; develop a sense of competence, belonging, and usefulness; experience hope, excitement, and ownership; and work creatively. These characteristics of a democratic classroom have strong resonance with the elements of Socratic dialogue. The ancient Socratic philosophy promoting a dialogical approach to teaching and learning intersects with more contemporary theoretical elaborations influenced by the various fields of psychology, linguistics, anthropology and education (Renshaw, 2004, p. 1). In relation to this approach, Vygotsky (1985; 1987) and Bakhtin (1986) have been influential in advancing an understanding of the social nature of learning and thinking.

### 2.4.1 *Socratic Pedagogy and Dialogue*

Dialogue plays a mediating role “in the development of thinking, the formation of individual identity and the construction of different communities of practice” (Renshaw, 2004, p.1). Dialogue is more than conversation—it is interaction; more than merely exchanging content knowledge—but includes the qualities and elements of communication that encompass dispositions.

Based on the writings of Bakhtin (1986), Timothy Koschmann (1999b) develops a theoretical framework for understanding learning as a socially-grounded phenomenon. Koschmann argues that “learning is enhanced when it occurs in settings of joint activity” (p. 308). The concept of dialogicality developed by Bakhtin (1986) is predicated upon the understanding that no discourse exists in and of itself but can be interpreted more broadly and contextually (1986, p. 137). The concept of dialogicality is summarised as referring to the idea that human psychological functioning is inherently dialogic (Eun, Knotek, & Heining-Boynton, 2008), and therefore the unit of analysis of human consciousness should be dialogue (Radzikhovski, 1991, p. 8).

Dialogicality is conceptualised as a basic capacity of the mind to “conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of ‘otherness’” (Markova, 2003, 91). Therefore, knowledge is co-constituted by individuals with others—it is essentially a social process. Engstrom (2014) notes that in another of Markova’s (2000) readings of Bakhtin (1981) dialogicality provides “a provocative dynamically and socio-culturally based” approach to human cognition and language. Therefore, dialogicality brings about “the epistemology of social change” (Engstrom, 2014, p. 122). The heterogeneous nature of interactions that are dialogic allow for voices of the other to expand the knowledge.

The notion of provocation being a key to the development of knowledge is worthy of consideration. New meanings and understandings add and interrogate previously held ideas with some tension. It is through dialogue in the tension where conflicting processes enable changing relevancies (Engestrom, 1999). Through dialogue, the other voices become incorporated into one’s voice, thinking and expression (Koschmann, 1999b, p. 308). Bakhtin described ‘word’ as a two-sided act; that is, the product of the reciprocal relationship between who is using the word and for whom the word is intended (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 86). This relationship has been characterised as a kind of conflict between “intersubjectivity - the need to develop shared understanding with others, and alterity - the opposing need to distinguish oneself from the other” (Wertsch, 1998). Dialogicality is a process of understanding whereby “the

utterances of a listener meet and confront the utterance of a speaker” (Wertsch & Smolka, 1993, p. 74). Within this context is the agency of the participants (Koschmann, 1999a).

Vygotsky’s use of the term intra-psychological functioning may be compared with Bakhtin’s concept of hidden dialogicality (Wertsch, 1991). This hidden or third voice, an implicit influence of the first more capable voice, has been referred to as a ventriloquation, that is, the hidden voice speaking through the first voice (Wertsch, 1991). An example of a possible detrimental influence of the third voice is provided by Eun et al. (2008). The developmental goals created for instructional contexts may be constrained by the “overarching third voice of high-stakes testing” (Eun et al., 2008, p.139). In such an instance, the initial and articulated learning goals may be consumed by the pressure of the expectations to prepare students to complete a test. In this example, Eun et al. caution against the third voice of testing speaking through the first voice of teaching. The role of the teacher in supporting or scaffolding development of knowledge, understanding and skills becomes secondary to the primary objective of preparing students to achieve in relation to a constraining set of questions on a test.

Vygotsky’s framework of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) was recontextualised with the elements of dialogicality and voice (Eun et al., 2008). The original concept of the ZPD as theorised by Vygotsky defined the ZPD as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 134). The hidden dialogicality incorporates an inaudible voice that can expand the original conceptualisation of the ZPD by articulating the underlying influential factors at play (Eun et al., 2008). In addition to the first voice of the more capable participant and the second voice of the less capable participant, there is the third voice that provides mediation of the “perceptions and interpretations of the first voice within the zone” (Eun et al., 2008, p. 136). Eun et al. argue that “the dialogical interactions occurring within the ZPD must be understood in a larger context to go beyond the visible and audible participants” (2008, p. 133).

The first voice of the teacher/tutor does not process and behave in “a social vacuum but is influenced by the socio-cultural context of the educational practices” (Eun et al., 2008, p. 134). According to Eun et al. (2008, p. 140), the concept of development for Vygotsky meant “becoming a culturally competent independent being, ...the ability to generalise to other tasks and situations that require similar intellectual functioning is an important requirement and

distinctive characteristic of development, that distinguish it from other similar concepts, such as learning” (2008, p. 142; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Identifying a renewed interest in dialogue allows an opportunity to reengage with the purpose of public discourse, “not as persuasion but as an ongoing exchange in which we test and contest and create ideas in cooperation and when necessary in conflict with others” (Zappen, 2004, p. 2). Zappen (2004) examines the source of Socratic methods driven by questioning and sums up his interpretation of Socrates as “not seeking but rather questioning universal definitions because he believes that others uphold definitions that they do not understand, definitions that are grounded in cultural values that they do not question, definitions that are moreover, in conflict with each other” (p. 3). Furthermore, Bakhtin observes in the Socratic dialogue “the same emphasis upon the dialogic nature of truth—the juxtaposing and testing, the colliding and contesting, the collectively seeking and birthing of ideas—that he finds in the Dostoevsky novels” (Zappen, 2004, p. 5).

Bakhtin (1986) questions how we can “bridge the experiential abyss between ourselves and others” (Zappen, 2004, p. 7). In the early dialogues of Socrates, he is characterised as one who “tests and contests and creates ideas in dialogue...with others” (Zappen, 2004, p. 13). This Socrates is not the speaker/writer/rhetor who seeks to persuade others to accept his own account of the virtuous life—his own logos—but the listener/reader/respondent who renders and receives accounts with others thus contributing to the multiplicity of meanings associated with the term and the concept of logos in the ferment of the fifth century BCE (Bakhtin, 1986, p.13). Bakhtin’s understanding of Socrates is as:

The questioner who draws forth and juxtaposes the inconsistent and conflicting beliefs of others, thus testing not only their ideas but also their persons (for the idea and the person were not yet separate), not only what they think but who they are and how they live. He is the *midwife* who brings together diverse ideas, thereby creating new ideas, new cultural hybrids. (Zappen, 2004, p. 13)

Bakhtin’s Socrates provides “one kind of response to the challenge of individual differences, the seemingly unbridgeable gap between self and other ... this Socrates also provides a response to the problem and the challenge of cultural differences” (Zappen, 2004, p. 18).

### 2.4.2 *Socratic Pedagogy in Practice*

Socratic pedagogy is understood to incorporate teaching and learning strategies that involve thinking through dialogue characterised by deep and continuous questioning, as asserted by Davey Chesters (2012) when she writes “all teaching methods inspired by Socrates have in common questioning and inquiry, in which all answers are subject to further questioning” (p. 10). The advocacy of Socratic classrooms and pedagogy implies a strong relationship between the teacher and students where the teacher understands that students must think for themselves in community with others to develop problem-solving and creative capacities (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 35). Cam (2006) summarised the general abilities of a person who has learnt to think effectively as:

The ability to think about the issues and problems that we face in our lives, to explore life’s possibilities, to appreciate alternative points of view, to critically evaluate what we read and hear, to make appropriate distinctions and needful connections, and generally to make reasonable judgements. (2006, p. 1)

The “to and fro” movement of agreement and disagreement, backwards and forwards from convergent to divergent thinking through the process of inquiry-based dialogue is the dynamic which gives dialogue rigor (Cam, 2006, p. 44). This examination and re-examination of ideas is a process referred to by Pardales and Girod (2006) as a “jury to ideas and hypotheses” (p. 301).

The aim to engage students in higher order thinking invites teachers to place “inquiry at the heart of education” (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 5) as a way of preventing the community being insocratic (Cam, 2006). Socratic dialogue aims to create independent thinking through reasoned judgments in collaborative contexts (Birnbacher, 2005). The purpose is not to arrive at answers to questions necessarily, but to evaluate the legitimacy of beliefs (Heckmann, 2004). Collaborative thinking and working allows for the critical investigation of one’s own beliefs and an identification of the inherent assumptions and limitations therein. Krohn (2004) identified four key features of Socratic dialogue:

- Starting with the concrete and remaining in contact with concrete experience;
- Full understanding between participants;
- Adherence to a subsidiary question until it is answered; and
- Striving for consensus.



The first process characteristic of Socratic dialogue connects with the concrete rather than hypothetical situations to encourage evidence to be found in authentic, lived experiences. The second characteristic relates to a purpose of dialogue to advance shared understanding of concepts. Kletschko and Siebert (2004) contend that deep understanding of what others mean is a fundamental prerequisite to be able to agree or disagree. Thirdly, the adherence to a subsidiary question compels the participants to continuous questioning; narrowing and refining towards an answer, a deepening of dialogue (Boele, 1998). The final characteristic of Socratic dialogue is striving for consensus so that all counter views and concepts can be considered, and a shared sense of the concept or claim has been established.

Davey Chesters (2012) contends that Socratic pedagogy is not just a philosophical pedagogy but a method that is dialogical in nature. There is a strong argument for adopting philosophy as pedagogy not simply as a curriculum—what we teach as a discrete unit of study about Philosophy—but how we teach (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 5). In this light Socratic pedagogy can entail a multi-dimensional approach to thinking underpinned by generative (creative), evaluative (critical) and connective (caring) thinking (Davey Chesters, 2012). Matthew Lipman's work in the field of philosophy for children reimagined the role of teacher and led to practice that engendered classrooms as communities of inquiry (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 2). Attentive, active listening is essential to Socratic dialogue which is predicated upon mutuality and engagement with others (Reeve, 2005).

Dialogue is not merely conversation (Gardner, 1995). Lipman (2003) distinguishes between conversation and dialogue by recognising that conversation seeks equilibrium among those who engage in it, whereas dialogue encourages disequilibrium from which new understanding and knowledge is created, perhaps with a developing or re-established equilibrium. It is the exploration of new ideas in disequilibrium that leads to a reconstruction of our knowledge and understanding (Lipman, 2003, p. 232). Dialogue takes place both between those active in the dialogue and within each person participating as the process of dialoguing encompasses internal thought or “inner dialogue” (Nottingham et al., 2017, p. 15).

Vygotsky (1987) theorised about internalisation—the translation of external thinking and dialogue internally into inner speech. Internal and external dialogue happens concurrently, and it is the inner dialogue which helps to process the multiplicity of views in the interactive external dialogue. Further elaboration suggests that “when there is no internalisation of the process of dialogue, what we are left with is a series of interconnected monologues by individuals rather

than a group moving towards a new understanding of the matter under discussion” (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 13).

The dialectic structure of some types of dialogue follows a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis and reflects the form of the dialogues translated by Plato which had as a purpose the rational resolution of problems or misunderstandings (Curnow, 2001, p. 234). From a social constructivist standpoint, Vygotsky described that space of natural ability from which a learner can move to potential ability through scaffolded instruction and interaction with teacher and others (Vygotsky, 1987).

Educators can create classroom opportunities for dialogue which cultivate democratic thinking, valuing and process. The interplay between silence and speech is one of reciprocity, balancing the interactions in dialogue (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). Silence within dialogue provides opportunities to think, digest, reflect and evaluate the thoughts expressed; “essential wait time” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 47). Silence allows for the listener to prepare questions and commentary on the thoughts or views expressed so that the dialogue can progress leading to decision-making, consensus or to further inquiry (Powell & Connor-Green, 2004; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). For collaborative, inquiry-based practices that enable freedom of speech, and a multiplicity of viewpoints and perspective, silence is critical (Davey Chesters, 2012).

Freire (1998) sees the value of the role of silence in dialogue in supporting genuine listening, entering into the process of engaging with others and allowing for space to devise deeper questions to prompt further thinking. The teachers’ knowledge of their students is an important factor in the facilitation of dialogue to determine the meaning of silences. This can be a challenging endeavour given the ambiguous nature of silence, but it is incumbent upon the teacher to know their students as set out in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) professional standards of practice (AITSL, 2015). Students may be actively listening, thinking, synthesising ideas, preparing questions. Conversely, students may be remaining silent and withdrawn from the interactive process due to personal, interpersonal, cognitive or behavioural issues, all of which may be difficult to determine (Dawid, 2005). The development of ethical capability including “traits which make it possible to form good judgements about how to act and how to live” (Splitter and Sharp, 1995, p. 165) can be cultivated through participation in dialogue– “the reciprocal relations which link our self-directed thoughts, feelings and actions with those thoughts, feelings and actions directed towards others, are fundamental” (p. 165).

Socratic dialogue may include engagement in meta-dialogue separate from the substantive dialogue (Saran and Neisser, 2004). Participants can clarify elements of the structure or protocols or any behaviour which creates a barrier to the inquiry. In addition, participants also engage in meta-dialogue during the feedback stage of the process. “Pedagogy is more than just methodology or curriculum, rather it is an underpinning philosophy of teaching and learning” (Davey Chesters, 2012). The inclusion of a Socratic dimension to curriculum design and pedagogy reflects a democratic process involving the engagement of students in making decisions in the classroom and a curriculum which reflects this recognition and agency of students. The following conditions for a curriculum to be reflective of democratic principles and enabling of democratic practices has relevancy to any discussion of contemporary pedagogy. Such a curriculum includes:

1. Critical literacy, which gives students personal and political facility with language, enabling them to evaluate what is read and heard and to name and construct models of preferred social life.
2. Cultural capital, which uses students’ own histories, lives, and surroundings to enhance their cultural awareness.
3. Social alternatives through which students are offered choices to the status quo that add to the social good.
4. Democratic values, in which students both debate and experience equality and community (Wood, 1998, p. 189–194).

### ***2.4.3 Socratic Pedagogies in Context***

A consideration of the social context within which learning takes place recognises that one of the major challenges for students is that of living in harmony with people of other cultures (ACARA, 2010). A pluralist society behoves its teachers to promote harmony and peaceful relations between diverse cultural groups. Multicultural education may be regarded as an education in freedom, and as articulated by Parekh (1985), “freedom from inherited biases and narrow feelings and sentiments, as well as freedom to explore other cultures and perspectives and make choices in full awareness of the available and practicable alternatives” (p. 22).

Intercultural learning is implicit in the goals of education related to citizenship (MCEETYA, 2008). The Values Education National Framework (DEEWA, 2005) recognises that education is not only about equipping students with a certain set of specific skills, but equally about building character. Lovat & Toomey (2009) summarise a commonly held

definition of what public education is and is chartered to do; that is, to be a comprehensive educator in the delivery of cognitive and practical skills and “an inculcator of personal morality and cohesive citizenry” (2009, p. xi).

The characteristics and capabilities required of good global citizenship as identified by Nussbaum include “the capacity for Socratic self-criticism and critical thought about one’s own traditions” (2009, p. 10). In addition, she argues that citizens need to see themselves as part of the broader communities of nation and world, recognising the histories and character of diverse groups. Importantly, Nussbaum presents the case to cultivate deep sympathy “to see another human being as a full person” and sees the development of “a narrative imagination” as a necessary condition of the citizen (p. 12).

A student-centred learning approach is an appropriate strategy for teaching adolescents about values (Cornelius-White, 2007; Yonezawa et al, 2012) but further review of the teacher’s role in and outside of the classroom is relevant to this study in so far as it relates to learner agency and autonomy. Adolescents require instruction, modelling of attitudes and behaviours, scaffolding of tasks and activities and direction and feedback. The role of feedback in the learning process has been supported by evidence from meta-analyses (Hattie, 2012, p. 129). The purpose of feedback as defined by Hattie and Timperley (2007) is to reduce the discrepancies between the current knowledge, understanding, skill or capability and the desired goal. William (2011) distinguishes between weaker forms of feedback and strong formative assessment where students are provided with information about accuracy of results, detailed explanation and specificity with regards to further activities to attempt with a view and plan for improvement (p. 144). Teachers scaffolding peer feedback need to model specific, targeted and timely feedback themselves and so their own practice of giving feedback is improved; otherwise they risk losing credibility with their students.

A student-centred learning environment does not dictate a “student-only” learning environment. The effect of direct instruction (Hattie, 2012) on student learning reflects the importance of the teacher in teaching, modelling and scaffolding learning. For sustained improvement in student learning outcomes, teachers must have sound content knowledge, use evidence-informed pedagogical practices and have supportive organisational structures and processes (Timperley, 2008). Pedagogical content knowledge combines robust subject area knowledge and the pedagogical agility to make the appropriate pedagogical choices for the learner at the appropriate time for learning; “an amalgam of content and pedagogy” (Loughran, 2012). Loughran makes the distinction between perspectives on teaching:

A transmissive view of teaching is in stark contrast to perceiving teaching as a process of enhancing learning through developing a deeper understanding of content, whereby teaching procedures and strategies are selected for particular reasons that are important to shaping learning in ways that are meaningful and valuable to the learner. (Loughran, 2012, p. 1)

Socially-cohesive learning environments contribute to the effectiveness of co-operative learning and involve the promotion of thoughtful learning which incorporates dialogicality (Ritchhart, 2002). A useful rubric outlining prerequisites for developing intellectual character was developed by Ritchhart of the Harvard University Project Zero (2002). Within a thoughtful classroom, students are given many rich and powerful opportunities to think for themselves. According to Ritchhart, a thoughtful classroom focuses students' thinking on big ideas, is highly engaging, offers students choice and allows for independent and autonomous thinking. The teacher's role is to model, scaffold and challenge students to lift their thinking to higher levels. Structured student talk is an essential ingredient to developing thinking to new heights. Students need structures for talking about ideas as explored further:

Talk, whether internalised self-talk, overt conversation, or writing, is one of our principal mechanisms for organising our thoughts, making sense of new ideas and pushing our thinking in new directions. At the same time, our ability to think grows and expands through our exposure to other people's thinking, ideas, and knowledge, which become available to us through their talk and writings. Given the importance of such talk to thinking, it's not surprising that thoughtful classroom environments are dominated by discussion, writing, and a general sense of reciprocity in conversation. (Ritchhart, 2002, p. 117)

The talk that accompanies the learning can support adolescents in consolidating their understanding and can help learners make personal connections with the learning which can be powerful. Personal experience plays a major role in Socratic dialogue as theoretical concepts are applied to concrete experiences and tested against the real and the personal (Davey Chesters, 2012, p. 57). Drawing upon a study into Human Rights Education and the implicit and explicit connections with the Australian curriculum, a number of recommendations relate to teacher pedagogical choices. Most notable, that teachers provide "experiential and activity-centred learning that involves problem-solving and futuristic thinking" (Burridge, 2020, p. 110). The challenges for teachers are profound in the context of a changed and changing culture encapsulated in the following prediction which has salience for current times:

The world people are going to own and live in is not a world in which people sit neatly and tidily and change every hour from one subject to another. It is not a world of bits and pieces. It is not a world of didacticism; it is not a world of certain answers; and it is not a world of prearranged sets of circumstances. It is a world where the individual has to learn and make her or his way for herself or himself, and therefore where the teacher has to become the supporter of the learner, which requires a fundamental reversal of the traditional role of the teacher. (Holland, 1997, p. 46)

Dialogue is reciprocal rather than competitive and dialogical thinking pushes beyond boundaries of the individualised, internalised world of thoughts allowing broader perspectives to influence positions and ideas to be explored more fully (Ritchhart, 2002). The interactions that students have with each other can support deep thinking and encourage both positive student interactions and civility and respectful relations (Fullan et al., 2018). Ritchhart places a premium on the basic communication skills of learning to listen to and respond to others. Responding to others is a crucial life skill and he describes the disposition of the listener who looks for connections to others' ideas and creates opportunities to build upon those ideas or expand and extrapolate (Ritchhart, 2002).

Educating adolescents in contemporary society must take into consideration the imperatives of an exponentially changing globalised market and village (Education Services Australia, 2008). Pigozzi (2006) alerts us to the challenges faced because of a growing internationalisation. Young people are especially challenged to hold the tension between being part of a local community as well as having global citizenship (Pigozzi, 2006). Workplaces are automating work tasks so workers must perform more non-routine tasks and individual and team problem-solving is increasingly complex. Workers will assume a more autonomous role in their workplaces and to that end, will require higher order reading, reasoning and expository skills (World Bank, 1999, p. 1).

A student's ability to transfer the knowledge acquired and skills developed is a dynamic process reflecting advanced adaptability necessary for the workplace. Hattie & Donoghue (2016), draw on the work of Marton (2006) who maintains that, when learned strategies are applied in another situation when that second situation resembles (or is perceived to resemble) the first situation, it is evidence of transfer. However, it is the ability of the learner to recognise the nuanced differences in situations, however minor, and still apply the knowledge and/or skills that is reflective of a capacity to transfer. In relation to an example of "thinking ethically", Lipman maintained that dispositions and behaviours learnt and practised in a classroom through

a process of inquiry will allow the application of those same decision-making skills to situations outside the classroom (1991, p. 242).

## **2.5 Socratic Circles Pedagogy**

As an in-class strategy for engaging students in discussion, Socratic Circles has been well-regarded and applied since Copeland's original work in developing this pedagogical approach to classroom dialogue (2005). However, Socratic Circles as a specific example of Socratic pedagogy, has received little research focus. The application of Socratic Circles has been predominantly a subject-based strategy used for text analysis and to engage students in critical thinking and discussion. Recently, studies exploring Socratic Circles as a technique to promote student discourse have been undertaken.

In one study, at the secondary school level, Brown (2016) focuses on how argumentation literacy emerges during a Socratic Circle. An investigation into the discourse patterns in Socratic Circles explores: "generalizations, communicative struggles, and co-construction of ideas". While Dialogic Education is already a predominant feature of primary school settings (Highman et al, 2014), this particular study considers the role of "exploratory talk" supporting the development of the argumentation practices in secondary classrooms. Further study on explicit instruction practices using dialogue in secondary schools is recommended recognising that Socratic Circles supports teachers to "create a more dialogic classroom" extending "learning talk" for extending understanding (Brown, 2016, p. 94). The study highlights the potential of Socratic Circles to enhance critical literacy for participation in civil society.

A study of the use of Socratic Circles in secondary History classes found a natural alignment between the structure of the discussion strategy and the skills required to analyse primary and secondary historical evidence using higher-order thinking (Thomas & Goering, 2018, p. 109). The study identified the benefits of the collaborative, non-combative nature of dialogue as opposed to examples of divisive interactions and recommended teachers employ Socratic Circles as a way of valuing student contribution in the learning process.

The preparatory work required of participants in this discussion framework requires critical thinking (Copeland, 2005). Learners are practised at answering questions more than formulating deep and open questions to generate thought and discussion. Learners must become proficient in attending to the text. It is important to understand the dimensions of written and visual text and be able to interpret what is being said, inferred or alluded to. Students frequently

need scaffolds to annotate texts in preparation for the observations they will make during discussions which precede writing tasks.

An investigation into the role of case-based Socratic Circles found that the discussion strategy helped to build the confidence of an undergraduate class and enhanced their experience of deep learning (Fisher & Machirori, 2019, p. 1). The transferable nature of Socratic Circles contributes to an understanding of “the relationships between engagement in a specific pedagogical strategy and sense of belonging, perceptions of achievement, and overall satisfaction with the learning experience” (Fisher & Machirori, 2019, p. 8).

The Socratic Circles teaching and learning process incorporates metacognitive strategies which support critical thinking (Balikcioglu & Efe, 2016; Almaliki, 2017). In primary school settings, further scaffolding and more explicit instruction is required to establish the conditions for critical thinking and “accountable conversations” (Ghiran, 2011, p. 15). The benefits of Socratic Circles have been experienced in the primary classroom, particularly in relation to engagement of learners in critical reading of texts at both a literal and interpretive level where students have shown development in posing and responding to open-ended questions and capacity to provide evidence for their thinking (2011, p. 15). Additionally, students have developed team-building skills that promote collaboration beyond friendship groups (p. 15).

Research about Socratic Circles has largely focused on application within subject-based contexts related to critical thinking and communication skills. A research gap exists into the potential effectiveness of Socratic Circles as a pedagogical approach across and beyond formal curriculum learning areas and in diverse educational and community settings. The use of Socratic Circles as a safe dialogic space for interaction and deep learning to focus on significant and contentious issues and concepts has not been explored. The potential for Socratic Circles to be more than just another teaching strategy for engaging learners but to maximise transformational dialogue is worthy of consideration.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The changing nature of classroom dialogue has been a feature of policy curriculum frameworks which promote the use of a variety of pedagogies to develop the skills of questioning, inquiry and critique. There exists a progression of understanding and articulation in government policy and goals around education and the place of values education. One response to this imperative is Socratic Circles Pedagogy which is the focus of this research as



a means of educating the whole child and offering an exemplary process relative to the appreciation of the Socratic processes. The features of Socratic dialogue are congruent with the aspirations for democratic classrooms wherein students have a strong voice and agency and interact in dynamic ways with their peers for improved learning.

The research question exploring the influence of Socratic Circles Pedagogy on values education for adolescent learners within sustainable education reform involved a literature review of re-engaging with the enduring and evolving aims of education and the review of Socratic pedagogy in the democratic classroom. Within the re-engagement with the aims of education, global and local contexts reflecting the increasing polarisation of ideologies leading to conflicts were examined, and educational reform was reviewed in light of values education as an initiative in response to global and national goals. Socratic pedagogies based on dialogicality were reviewed as a mechanism for student participation and agency. In consideration of the efficacy of Socratic pedagogy for values education, the literature has shown connections between international and national relevance and the theoretical underpinnings of dialogue to substantially contribute to a Values Education program.

While dialogue is shown to be important and Socratic dialogue is considered important for considering contentious topics, the extent to which Socratic Circles Pedagogy as a systematic process is effective in contributing to the enduring aims of education is unexplored. As such, further investigation of the central research question is justified - *To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?* As shown in this review, the extent to which the current evidence in the literature sufficiently answers this question is limited. The chapters that follow record the practical application of Socratic Circles Pedagogy in values education for adolescent learners within a sustainable educational reform.

## **Chapter 3      Research Methodology and Design**

This chapter introduces the methodology and research design chosen for the study. It provides a description and rationale of how the research was conducted, examines the methods of data collection, and provides comment on the methods of data analysis and their limitations. This research explored how at macro (system), meso (school), and micro (student), levels, participants experienced a Socratic Circles pedagogical application by the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster (MIIC) in response to the values education reform. The study employed a qualitative approach to data analysis and was conducted via a three-phase research program which explored the research questions across macro-, meso- and micro-levels of participant engagement.

The study investigated the use of Socratic Circles as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning about values among adolescent learners in the MIIC. Furthermore, the study examined the efficacy of Socratic Circles Pedagogy (SCP) in teaching values as part of a national education reform effort. In a traditional study with an experimental design, the SCP would be considered the intervention of interest. However, the possibility of exploring in depth the effects of Socratic Circles in the absence of a control group or other pedagogical approaches was not conceptualised prior to the enactment of the MIIC project. As such a retrospective case study (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010) was identified as most appropriate for the conduct of this research.

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This research study adopted a constructionist epistemology and a theoretical perspective based upon interpretivism. Symbolic interactionism is used as an expression of the interpretivist perspective, and case study research methodology is chosen as an approach to theory development as an interpretative frame of meaning is applied to the data. The approaches to data gathering within a case study methodology include accession of participant observations, individual and group semi-structured interviews, field notes, case reports and the analysis of relevant documentation. The constant comparative approach to the analysis of data is consistent with the “particularistic, descriptive and heuristic” elements of case study as described by Merriam (2009, p. 46). Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) is a technique which enables a progressive refinement of respondent themes that the researcher identifies as significant to the project focus (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000).

### **3.1.1 Epistemology: Constructionism**

The understandings developed in this study were drawn from the analysis of perspectives from students, teachers, school leaders, government statutory authorities, and project managers responsible for the enactment of the Values Education project. Qualitative researchers are concerned with “an emic, ideographic, case-based position, which directs their attention to the specifics of particular cases” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 9), and understands reality to be a subjective construct (Creswell, 1994, p. 5). Constructionist epistemological assumptions assert that all knowledge “is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Constructionism is predicated upon the stance that meaning is constructed, rather than discovered, and that it is constructed in human interaction, and expressed as a shared consciousness (Crotty, 1998).

### **3.1.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism**

A theoretical perspective within a constructionist approach to understanding knowledge is interpretivism. Interpretivism emphasises social interaction as the foundation for knowledge (O’Donoghue, 2007) and entails the social and communicative skills of the researcher to explore how others make sense of their world. This perspective views the acquisition of knowledge as constructed through “mutual negotiation” and is situation-specific (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 10). The process of interpretivism explains how individuals come to know something by way of “a negotiation of meaning through communication” (Smith & Lovatt, 1991, p. 75) which is understood to be continuous over time as participants continue to interact and shared assumptions are developed (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985).

Interpretivism presupposes that all human action is meaningful and requires interpretation and understanding within the context of social interaction and practices (O’Donoghue, 2007; Usher, 1996). For the interpretivist who seeks to make meaning of human action, the social rules of engagement and interaction necessitate investigation (O’Donoghue, 2007).

### **3.1.3 Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is an approach to the study of human conduct and group life. It is “a theoretical perspective derived from pragmatism which assumes that people construct knowledge about themselves, society, and reality through interaction” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 186).

This perspective illuminates the dynamism between meaning and actions and, typically, involves symbols for exchange. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the processes through which meanings are created and mediated. The inherent assumption of the perspective is that individuals are “active, creative, and reflective and that social life consists of processes” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 610).

The symbolic interactionist emphasises meaning and action. The social world, characterised by cultural and structural diversity, is created and re-created through interaction, nullifying “the distinctions between internal and external worlds, or micro- and macro-levels of analysis” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 498). Bryant and Charmaz (2010) observe that symbolic interactionism is predicated upon an understanding of an agentic actor and action. Such an emphasis leads the researcher to attend to the process of deductive research rather than researching according to an assumed structure. In this instance, each student involved in the Socratic Circles process is perceived to be an agent of social discourse, criticism and action.

Interactionism as a theoretical position seeks to account for the ways humans construct their own worlds (Musolf, 2009). The foundation of interactionism is understanding the subjective intentions of the behaviour, and not predicting, controlling or gathering “mere statistical knowledge of it” (Musolf, 2003, p. 87). Minded behaviour has meaning, purpose and pattern (Musolf, 2009, p. 311); and as Denzin (2003) emphasises, the subjectivity of all interaction reveals that “no project or discourse is innocent, objective, or standpoint-neutral” (p. 1002). Perinbanayagam (1975) summarised the process of construction of meaning through interaction as:

The self takes that attitude of the generalised other toward itself, interprets it, understands it, and then incorporates it into his [*sic*] own self conceptions and universes of meaning; the self and other, generalised though it may be, participate in the construction of self, meaning, and world. (Perinbanayagam, p. 509)

Following from Blumer’s (1986) notion of the nature of human interaction process, Chenitz & Swanson (1986b) focus on the role of consensus and general agreement in group settings. Prawat (1996) concludes that the central tenet of the social constructivist theory is that meanings attributed to objects in contexts are fundamentally constructed by individuals and then meaning is mediated socially. Participants define objects, events and situations and this leads to shared understanding of the meaning/s of objects which influenced group dynamics and behaviour. Within this framework, the idea of self-concept is integral to understanding an

individual's ability to interpret interactions and modify responsive behaviours in accordance with their self-concept (Lauer & Handel, 1977).

Advocates of interactionism posit that to understand the motivations behind people's behaviours one must comprehend people's ideas, their account of the situation, their subtle behaviours and the meaning that people assign to social objects (Musolf, 2009). The interactionist submits that individuals are actively engaged in a culture and/or subculture and as such "inter-subjectively share the symbolic meaning of objects, communication and interaction" (Musolf, 2009, p. 311). Specifically, it is through the interaction with "objects, others, and ourselves as objects, as symbolic representations, that we engage in symbolic interactions" (Musolf, 2009, p. 315).

Symbolic interactionism emphasises "the interaction of structure and agency through which humans are constructed by society as they are in the process of constructing it" (Musolf, 2009, p. 305). As humans interact they assign arbitrary and agreed meaning to things; that is, they constitute symbols (Musolf, 2009, p. 309). Musolf characterises human interaction as "a conversation of significant symbols, significant in the sense that the symbol means the same to all actors involved in the situation and hence, symbolic interaction or communication" (Musolf, 2009, p. 309).

The agency of the actors in social interaction is of primary concern to Meltzer and Manis (1992) who contend that the characteristics of social life are constantly evolving, are not a static structure but essentially creative and open-ended. "Human beings negotiate, or construct, what is happening, and the behavioural outcomes are never completely known in advance... Individual actors find that their actual behaviour in given situations may differ from what they expected to do" (Meltzer & Manis, 1992, p. 336).

Musolf (2009) emphasises the impact of values and politics to shape cultural destiny. Characterising the self as a social object, he adds that individuals can act upon the object of self, reconstituting it. He concludes that "society, self, and mind are in a perpetual, recursive, and irreducible process of becoming" (Musolf, 2009, p. 216). Symbolic interactionism provides a model of human behaviour following a pattern of stimulus–interpretation–response, advancing "emergence, selves, and the notion that society is constituted into ongoing process of joint action" (Blumer, 1986, p. 541). Some of the defining human characteristics to which symbolic interactionists attend closely include: emergence, process, uncertainty, contingency, reflectivity, choice, ephemerality and transformation (Musolf, 2009, p. 319).

The purpose of this kind of research is to seek to understand the behaviour and meanings people attribute to their experiences in an authentic setting with the intention to illuminate the basic psychosocial process (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011; Glaser, 1978).

The process of understanding human behaviour in different situations necessitates an appreciation that humans respond to specific situations based upon their subjective sense and definition of that situation rather than based on the situation as presented objectively to them (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011; Lauer & Handel, 1977). Influenced by the philosophical underpinnings of symbolic interactionism, the researcher aims to identify and understand the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences in the natural context to understand communicative processes (Glaser, 1978). The value of examining human behaviour in the context of the activity is underscored as it allows the researcher the opportunity to consider all influencing social factors and conditions (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986a).

The practice of field work is essential for the researcher to determine and draw conclusions about what transpires in the symbolic world of the research subjects (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), where human beings interpret and respond to stimuli where they act and behave according to shared meanings (Charon, 1992; Reynolds & Herman, 1994). The collection of data through interviews and observations in natural settings provides a chance to develop understanding of the behaviour itself and the environment that provides background and meaning to the behaviour (Davis, 1986). The importance of collecting data in the field is emphasised as it provides an opportunity for the researcher “to understand experiences and behaviours of human beings as *they* understand them, to learn more about *their* world, discover *their* interpretation of self in interactions, and share *their* definitions of their worlds” (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011, p. 1971).

### **3.1.4 Case Study Methodology**

A case study approach in educational research informs the establishment of a teaching and learning standard through the development of innovative policy and/or changes to existing policy (Timmons & Cairns, 2012). Policymakers are influenced by evidence arising from research in the field. A case study approach to research creates knowledge and understanding of effective teacher practice through “development and implementation of policy, and gaining experience through exposure to a particular phenomenon” (Timmons & Cairns, 2012, p. 2). By studying the process and impact of Socratic dialogue through a case study methodology across

settings of classroom and intercultural interschool gatherings, the researcher is able to gain more knowledge about the application and efficacy of this pedagogical strategy.

Interpretive theory prompts an “imaginative understanding” of the studied experience. It assumes, “emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual” (Charmaz, 2011, pp. 126–127; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Strauss and Corbin (1998) distinguish between mere description and theory: description serving a perfunctory purpose of conjuring mental images of the participants, the objects, events and experiences whereas theory transcends the literal being more characteristically abstract and explanatory in nature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15).

Alasuutari (1996; 2004) draws a clear distinction between definitions of theory as “generalised statements about universals from which researchers deduce hypotheses to explain local, specific phenomena” (1996, p. 382) and argues that theories “provide interpretive frames from which to view realities” (p. 382). Manis and Meltzer (1994) argue that researchers can benefit from insight derived from unexpected but significant events observed through open and flexibly structured inquiry (p. 54). The concept of serendipity explored by Meltzer (1995) emphasises the opportunity for exploration of unpredictable categories of data (p. 93). Through observation of this interaction, the researcher can develop an understanding of the meanings co-constructed in the actors’ interactions (Meltzer & Manis, 1992, p. 339).

The methodological principles of symbolic interactionism research involve intensive data collection over extended periods of time to study the lived world of human interaction to determine the ways in which situations or contexts are defined by participants (Blumer, 1969). Case study as a methodology allows for a deep appreciation of a phenomenon in “real contexts” as opposed to “providing decontextualized evidence” (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 6). In addition, ethnographic case study approaches as used in education focus on the culture of institutions or groups, aspects of teaching and learning methods and behaviours (Merriam, 1998, pp. 34–37). Within the paradigm of interpretivism, symbolic interaction provides the specific theoretical position, a perspective which underscores the primacy of interaction:

When interacting, people enact who they are; they reflexively and purposefully develop identities over time linking past, present, and imaginary future. Their actions carry meanings that may implicate other people not immediately present, or broader social structures not immediately apparent. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012, p. 498)

The focus of the research was the building of new understandings to address the challenges concerning values education in Australian schools. The use of an intensive case

study of the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster was designed to reflect real human experience in the application of this educational phenomenon. Case study was also chosen as the preferred method in this research as it can be a force in setting public policy. This research included close reading of national and state policies and documentation as well as the collection of data including interviews with key stakeholders and case reports.

Data were collected from principals, curriculum coordinators, teachers, parents, former students, curriculum administrators, education program managers of community organisations, education officers in Government and Catholic organisations associated with five secondary schools. Each of the five schools was selected for the study because of its membership in the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster. In this study, the theoretical categories pertain to fundamental questions about what was happening at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of participant engagement. Broadly, at the national level, this was in relation to the urgency to address the teaching of *Values for Australian Schooling* (DEEWR, 2005) and at the cluster level in order to attend to intercultural understanding and capability. More specifically, this relates to the pedagogical level pertaining to the use of Socratic Circles as a discussion genre with an open dialogue framework of learning.

### **3.2 The Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster: A bounded case**

This study focuses on the implementation of a nationalised Values Education reform initiative in Australian schools that reflected the changing emphasis in the political agenda with relation to education during the period of 2002–2010. Chapter 4 provides a detailed overview of the context of the case study; the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster (MIIC), a collective participant in the Values Education Commonwealth Government initiative. The researcher set clear boundaries around a population for investigation. The MIIC is the specifically defined group to which the description of theory is applicable. This understanding fits with the notion of “a case” as a bounded system (Adelman et al., 1976, p. 141).

The national Values Education reform program was supported by Australian Commonwealth and State governments during the period 2002–2010. The focus of this case was the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster (MIIC). This Cluster comprised five schools representing diverse faith and cultural backgrounds from the three education system sectors: Government, Independent and Catholic. The Cluster was one of 25 initiatives supported in the second phase of the national Values Education project (DEEWR, 2008). Socratic Circles was chosen as the pedagogical tool for learning about values, particularly those pertaining to



the values of understanding, acceptance, tolerance, respect, responsibility and freedom as articulated in the National Framework.

The researcher, immersed in a study of people interacting, can ascertain how they, at times on a subliminal level, respond to the perceptions of others to determine the social world. Interactionists are concerned with how identities develop in settings and how order is negotiated in individual and communal interactions (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011). Understanding naturally derives from our participation in others' shared realities (Prus, 1996). In a practical sense, Bryant and Charmaz (2011) advocate the researcher's sharing some, but not all, viewpoints with those studied. Although this was not a strictly ethnographic study, the approach encouraged the researcher to delve deeply into the experience to render an authentic interpretation. In this research, the researcher was the Cluster Coordinator and thus involved in the many shared experiences of the project and responsible for the coordination of all gatherings. However, the researcher did not participate in any of the Socratic Circles discussions but acted as an observer. One of the characteristics of the Socratic Circles is the emphasis on student-centred and driven discussion, so the teacher's role is facilitatory rather than instructional. This maximises the opportunity for students themselves to take ownership of the discussion and control the context, direction and scope of the formal conversation. The teacher's observation of the discussion provides evidence of learning and exposes gaps in student knowledge. Teachers are then able to prompt further discussion and provide direct instruction related to unanswered questions deepening exploration of issues and addressing inaccuracies.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This research study was conducted within the context of the second phase of the formal nationalised Values Education reform program: Values Education Good Practice Schools Project (VEGPS-2, DEEWR, 2008). The study design drew on the principles of case study, using practices consistent with a Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). Semi-structured, in-depth individual and group interviews were used during the three phases of data collection. The process for completing this study was divided into seven stages as summarised in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Research Design Overview.**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Focus</b>
1. Research Aim	Established in context of central research question: To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?
2. Literature Review	Traditional literature review focusing on aims of education, pedagogy, values, Socratic dialogue; Emergence of categories and sub-categories followed by process of theorising and review of literature
3. Ethics	Ethical clearance and approvals
4. Recruitment of participants	Recruitment of key stakeholder with interest in MIIC project: Student Teacher and School Leader System
5. Data Collection	Semi-structured individual and group interviews at three levels of engagement: macro, meso and micro
6. Data Analysis	Initial data analysis through a process of open coding; Identification of insights and emerging themes; Elucidation of emergent theory; Critical reflection on the role and voice of the researcher
7. Recommendations & Identification of fields for potential further research	Conclusions and key recommendations to the government and educational community and unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge on related research

The underlying aim of the research design was to facilitate the collection and analysis of the data for the dissemination of insights that contribute to the knowledge base on pedagogical approaches to sociocultural engagement in education. Each stage was developmentally focused on the progression towards advancing knowledge with reference to the core and central research question: *To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?* Specifically, how were Socratic Circles used to engage adolescent learners in the National Values Education program as part of the work of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster and how did this educative process align with the aims of the National Framework of Values Education? The following section presents in detail the procedures undertaken at each stage to complete the study.

Alongside the review of the academic and theoretical literature and prior to the formal process of data collection through interviews, a desktop review of key documents relating to the Values Education reform initiative was conducted. This review included an interrogation of

interview transcripts, recordings of conversations, observational records and reference to relevant government policy documents and reports relating to the MIIC project. During the period 2006–2008, the MIIC submitted regular and various reports as required by the project guidelines and funding agreement. These reports document the planning, implementation and evaluation of the achievement of the aims of the project. Reports submitted were those written by individual school coordinators of the five schools involved as well as reports documenting the work of the cluster as a whole written by the Cluster Coordinator. Table 3.2 lists the key documents according to the levels of inquiry and analysis which informed the development of the research design including the core question, and interview questions.

**Table 3.2 Documents for Analysis**

<b>Macro (system)</b>	<b>Meso (school)</b>	<b>Micro (classroom)</b>
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Australian Curriculum Framework	Socratic Circles rubric annotations
National Framework for Values Education	State Curriculum Frameworks	Socratic Circles feedback sheet
Adelaide Declaration on National Goals	State Values Education Reports	Socratic Circles - critical reading stage stimulus texts
Melbourne Declaration on National Goals		Physical artefacts of the MIIC
Values Education Project Reports		

Document analysis plays an important role in the corroboration and augmentation of evidence from other sources. In this study, the documents analysed, noted in (Table 3.2) informed the development of the central research question and interview focus with particular reference to assessing the stated aims of the MIIC project and the chosen pedagogy. Notwithstanding, caution is advised to sort and determine the most crucial documents key to the relevance of the case study so as to avoid an overabundance of documentary data (Yin, 2009, p. 105). Documents, including written reports, media articles and physical artefacts are able to be reviewed repeatedly during the process of data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 102).

### **3.3.1 Participants**

The choice of participants for any study in any site influences the extent to which transferability of conclusions may be made to other sites and contexts (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Participants were selected using a purposive selection strategy. Within this

study, the participants were considered according to their identified level of participation as adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979) and introduced in Figure 1.1. Students were engaged as the micro-level of inquiry; school leaders and teachers conform to a meso-level of inquiry; and system authorities and governments play a role at a macro-level of inquiry.

The participant profile represented three stakeholder groups encompassing the multiple interests within each group. The participants were recruited and organised according to three discrete levels of involvement and were selected on the basis of their specific knowledge of and involvement in the MIIC. This purposive selection approach maximises the potential for “high-quality, detailed descriptions” and “important shared patterns” (Patton, 1990, p. 172). Participants (Table 3.3) were either directly involved in the MIIC Socratic Circles as student participants; indirectly involved as teacher facilitators, or observers; or system representatives who observed or evaluated and reported on the activities of the MIIC.

At the macro-level and given the formative role of the Curriculum Corporation in the National Values Education reform project, the context of this research study, it was considered prudent and productive to interview key members of this organisation. Their observations and understanding of the workings of the MIIC also provided insight into the research at the micro level.

A project director and a manager from the Curriculum Corporation were interviewed. The Project Director was interviewed during the first two phases of the data collection. The Project Manager was interviewed during the first phase of the data collection process. Also at the macro-level were representatives of the three sectors of educational organisations: Government, Catholic and Independent. One project officer from the State Education Department was interviewed in Phases One and Two of the data collection process. The Education Department Project Officer role involved responsibility for supporting the clusters of schools throughout their respective states. The Project Officer also convened meetings of cluster coordinators and Government, Catholic and Independent sectors support staff as well as the Critical Friends of the University Associate Network.

A representative of the Catholic Education Office was interviewed during Phase One. This Project Officer had observed the work of the MIIC directly and was a member of Government, Catholic and Independent sector partnership projects. A representative of the Parents Advisory Board of the Independent Schools Association was interviewed during Phase One, providing representation of the Independent sector and offering a parental perspective on Values Education in Australian Schools.

An education officer at a community organisation was interviewed during the second phase of interviews to provide a perspective on community partnerships during the Values Education program. In the role of education officer, observation of the MIIC took place which led to a sustainable off-shoot project. This perspective added a community dimension to the research.

It is significant to note that some individuals at the macro-level who were approached were unable to participate in the study due to constraints relating to their bureaucratic positions and responsibilities. Researching influentials is a complex area of research. Researching the powerful in education can be stymied by barriers of access in cases where the research involves controversial or politicised policy initiatives (Walford, 1994; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Issues of transparency and accountability can arise when access to government officials is denied.

At the meso-level, school administrators were chosen to participate in order to provide a school leadership vantage point. Two principals of participating schools were interviewed during Phase One of the data collection. One school principal was interviewed during Phase Two. One cluster co-coordinator was interviewed during Phase One. Two school Values Education coordinators were interviewed: one during Phase One and one during Phase Two. Two teachers were interviewed during Phase One. In addition, the Cluster Co-coordinator, school Values Education Coordinators and classroom teachers were also interviewed representing the perspective of program delivery in Phases One and Two of the data collection process.

At the micro-level, seven former student participants in the MIIC were interviewed in Phases One, Two and Three. There were six individual interviews and two group interviews. Six students participated in two group interviews involving three students in each. These were conducted during Phase Three. Former students represented four of the five cluster schools and constituted a diverse sample of faith and cultural backgrounds. The rationale for the selection of former students who had graduated was centred on their capacity to reflect on their experience of schooling from the perspective of program completion and on the basis of having had the time and opportunity for deeper reflection.

The context of this study located within the national program of Values Education required participation by those government and non-government stakeholders who positioned Values Education on the political agenda, and those charged with the mandate to deliver the reform. To this end, government and statutory authority representatives were invited to

participate in interviews in the various phases of data collection. At the macro level, system representatives including Education sector representatives (Catholic Education Office officers, Education Department officers); Government and statutory authorities (Project Director, Manager, Officers), and Community organisation (Project Officers) engaged in the research. Macro-level participant selection was based upon the involvement of individuals to inform policy development and manage a range of administration functions. In addition, each of these participants either observed the workings of the MIIC directly or were provided with detailed descriptions of observed experience of the MIIC through regular reports. The participant profile of each stakeholder group is summarised in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3 Participant Profile**

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Stakeholder Profile</b>
Students (micro).	Former members of the MIIC who had graduated from school; Former members of the MIIC who attended most (at least 90%) of the interschool gatherings as part of the MIIC project; Former members of the MIIC Student Executive group chosen by School Values Education coordinators; and Former members of the MIIC group who were able to be contacted.
Teachers, lead teacher and cluster coordinators, parents and principals (meso).	Teachers, lead teachers and cluster coordinators who attended interschool gatherings of the MIIC; Parent representative who attended briefing sessions about the MIIC and had a connection to a participating school; Principals of the MIIC schools who endorsed the design and delivery of the MIIC project.
Government, educational and community authorities (macro).	Project Director who coordinated the Commonwealth and State Education response to the Values Education project; Project Manager who coordinated the evaluation and reporting of the Values Education project including the work of the MIIC; Project officers from Victorian Education Department and Catholic Education Office who monitored the work of the Values Education project including the work of the MIIC; Education Officer from partner community organisation– Immigration Museum, Melbourne.

### **3.3.2 Participant Recruitment**

The recruitment process for participants began with an invitation that included a detailed explanation of the research and consent form. This was re-visited prior to each interview and the process, including the option to withdraw consent at any time, reiterated. The participants understood that they could withdraw their participation and were given the opportunity to verify the content of the interview transcripts. This process of member checks was essential for establishing credibility of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

All participants were over the age of 18 and ethical expectations of the research were approved (See Appendix A). Participants were informed of the consent process in writing and at the beginning of each interview, conditions of ongoing consent were explained with an emphasis on the option to withdraw their consent at any point in the process (Jokinen, Lappalainen, Meriläinen, & Pelkonen, 2002, p. 6). Participants were assured of confidentiality, including the de-identification of the interview data (Creswell, 2008, p. 238).

Letters of invitation (See Appendix A) to participate in interviews were sent to individuals from each of the stakeholder groups. An explanation of the research aims was provided including the potential contribution of the individual to the exploration of relevant issues according to each individual's particular involvement in the MIIC. An explanation of the planned process of interviews included the provision of a copy of guiding questions (Table 3.3) to be used in the individual interviews. The invitation stated the right of each volunteer to withdraw from the process at any stage of the study, including the right to withdraw the transcript of the interview. Interviews were conducted following receipt of the completed consent forms Appendix A.

## **3.4 Data Collection**

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the experience of participants at the three levels of stakeholder, the researcher engaged in individual and focus group interviews, collecting data over three years. The data collection took place through three phases including two phases of individual interviews and one final phase of focus group interviews. This lengthy period of data collection enabled the constant comparative process to reveal the development of educational reform at a national level and the development of the curriculum framework at a state level. The inclusion of a variety of data sources facilitated further checks for understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Data was collected from 30 participants in total from September 2010 until December 2012. Twenty-two individual interviews were conducted. These included: three interviews with principals of former MIIC project schools; five interviews with former teacher coordinators of MIIC project schools; eight interviews with former MIIC students; three interviews with project managers and officers from the Statutory Authority; two interviews with state government Education Department bureaucrats; one interview with a Catholic Education office project manager; one interview with a representative of the Independent Schools Parent Council; and one interview with an education officer of a state community organisation. Additionally, two group interviews, each with three former MIIC students, were conducted. Data was collected in three phases and focused on distinct elements of the project from values education through to the applicability of Socratic Circles pedagogy to achieve such aims. Table 3.4 presents a summary of participation at each phase of the data collection process.

***Table 3.4 Overview of Participant Distribution and Focus of Data Collection***

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Phase 1 (Interview) Educational aims; Aims of Values Education</b>	<b>Phase 2 (Interview) Project outcomes Socratic Circles pedagogy</b>	<b>Phase 3 (Focus group) Socratic Circles Pedagogy</b>
Students	3	4	6
Cluster Coordinators	2	1	
Lead teachers	1	1	
Principals	2	1	
Classroom teachers	1		
Project director	1	1	
Project Manager		1	
Parent representative	1		
Education Project Officer	1	1	
Community project officer		1	
Non-government project officer		1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>

The choice of data-gathering strategies aligns with the overarching interpretivist research paradigm, constructionist epistemology and the theoretical perspective of symbolic



interactionism. The variety of methods used are consistent with case study methodology and were conducted concurrently. In addition, the capacity to triangulate data from multiple methods and perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups acted to ensure validity of the conclusions (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 95; Yin, 2009, p. 116). Moreover, the researcher was a non-participant observer which enabled more measured observations of particular behaviours and interactions (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

First-hand observations of unfolding interactions and experiences allow for a deeper understanding of the evolution of meanings as they develop in different situations (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (1967) contend that personal experiences in the research context, are preferable to retrospective questioning canvassing reflections on past events and attitudes. This assumes that personal observations constitute richer empirical material.

### **3.4.1 Observation**

Socratic Circles discussions were observed across the four years of the MIIC project, including observation of video-recorded Socratic Circles discussions. The discussions were observed to determine the quality of the communication and the depth of the exploration of the ideas among participants. An observation rubric enabled the gathering and analysis of learners' specific and observable behaviours and dispositions. These observations were recorded using the model rubric developed by Copeland (2005) (Appendix B). Students' peer-to-peer observations were also considered as data for the research. Student interactions prior to and following Socratic Circles discussions were also observed as well as the interactions between teachers and students.

The researcher's role as coordinator of the project, within which the case study was bounded, allowed for detailed records of sustained observation of the Values Education educational opportunities prior to and during the research study. Observations were also made by members of a University Associate Network (See Appendix C for a sample of observation notes). These critical friends detailed and summarised observations of the educational encounters as part of the funded project reporting requirements including published reports by statutory authorities on behalf of State and Federal Governments. Observation of the Cluster activities prompted some of the guiding questions used during the interviews.

### 3.4.2 Interviews

The flexibility and dynamism of the case study approach enables investigation of issues not foreseen by the researcher as distinct from quantitative methods such as in surveys which are bound by a defined set of questions (Timmons & Cairns, 2012). In the interview process, the researcher can prompt subjects with further questions dependent upon the initial responses provided. This responsive disposition of the researcher takes cues from the experiences of the subjects and more detail is able to be collected as other related considerations emerge.

Interpretive methods of research require an engagement with the research participants' milieu. The establishment of a relationship and rapport reflects a respect for participants and can lead to further access to conduct subsequent interviews or observations (O'Donoghue, 2007). This occurred in this research in Phase Three of the data collection which included focus interviews with individual interviewees from Phase One and Two of the data collection. As a spoken genre of text, the intensive interview is a formal directed conversation with a predictable question and answer technique (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). It allows a detailed exploration of a subject, issue or relevant experience and is a productive method of interpretive inquiry (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011, p. 25). Intensive in-depth interviewing elicits a participant's descriptive experience and interpretation of that experience.

Intensive in-depth interviewing is compatible with case study method's "open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible approaches" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29). The practitioner as researcher employs qualitative interviewing as a method of exploring a phenomenon about which the researcher has extensive experience and some insight (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) questions the basic social process in any setting as influencing the participants' positions and resulting vantage points (2006, p. 20). This question provokes deep consideration of the sorts of questions generated in this study for the different stakeholders at the macro-, meso- and micro-vantage points of the Values Education project. For instance, student participants in the process nominated *friendships developed* as both an aim and outcome of their involvement in the project; however, from the teachers' perspectives, the learning experience and intellectual exchange of ideas was the driving motivation for the interaction.

Focus group interviews function to allow dialogic interaction enabling multiple perspectives on the same issues with the potential of joint construction of meanings and perspectives (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 560). Focus group interviews function to consolidate thinking, allowing the researcher to clarify and confirm earlier ideas and develop

theories related to shared understandings of issues (Creswell, 2008). This was the reasoning behind the choice to complete the data collection in Phase Three, with focus group interviews.

Clarifying research questions which guided the study relate to the multiple and interdependent perspectives of the central question and guide the study. The clarifying questions are organised according to the level of inquiry and are outlined in Table 3.5. The open-ended questions at the beginning of the interviews were broad-based and became increasingly specific. The guiding questions used in the individual and focus group interviews are outlined.

**Table 3.5 Clarifying and Guiding Interview Questions**

<p>Macro-level of inquiry - System</p>	<p><b>Clarifying Research Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role do governments play in initiating, implementing, evaluating and reporting educational reform?</li> </ul> <p><b>Guiding questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you perceive to be the aims of education? What did you see as the place of Values Education in the achievement of these aims?</li> <li>• What are the key values citizens need to understand and demonstrate to participate in Australian society?</li> <li>• What role can schools play in creating or supporting citizenship, social cohesion and democracy in the community? In what ways did projects and activities undertaken in association with the Values reforms contribute to Australian society?</li> <li>• What do you believe is the most effective way of introducing reform in Australian schools? How should reform be conceived, implemented, evaluated. Do you consider that Values Education has been an effective reform in Australian education?</li> <li>• What do you consider to be the key strategies for introducing a national educational reform such as Values Education?</li> <li>• To what extent can curriculum development at the level of state systems and schools support national educational reform?</li> <li>• What are the best measures of the success, extent and effectiveness of the implementation of educational reform?</li> <li>• Do you believe that Values Education has been a successful reform in Australia education? What worked?</li> <li>• What are some of the challenges to introducing reform in curriculum, teaching and learning, especially in areas such as Values?</li> <li>• How effective do you think the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster was in addressing these challenges?</li> </ul>
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*Table 3.5 continued*

Meso-level of inquiry - School	<p><b>Clarifying Research Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role do school leaders and teachers play in supporting the teaching and learning of values?</li> </ul> <p><b>Guiding questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you perceive to be the aims of education? How did national reforms in Values Education address these aims?</li> <li>• How is reform best introduced and maintained in the school setting? How did national reforms in Values Education and the work of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster impact upon curriculum, teaching and learning in your school?</li> <li>• What is the role of schools in learning and teaching about values? How do national reforms in values “fit” with the particular values of your particular school community?</li> <li>• How do you assess Socratic Circles as a pedagogical tool in Values Education?</li> <li>• What do you think your school gained by being a participant in this reform effort?</li> </ul>
Micro- level of inquiry - Student	<p><b>Clarifying Research Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the effective features of the Socratic Circles approach to discussion?</li> <li>• How does this approach engage adolescent learners?</li> <li>• What were the structures which supported the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster?</li> </ul> <p><b>Guiding questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you perceive to be the aims of education?</li> <li>• What were the aims of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster and to what extent do you perceive they were achieved?</li> <li>• What values are you able to demonstrate through a project such as the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster?</li> <li>• How effective do you believe Socratic Circles were in achieving the aims of the project?</li> <li>• What did you gain from being a participant in this project?</li> </ul>

Interview transcripts in combination with observation notes and reports constitute a rich data set (Birks & Mills, 2011). In-depth interviews allow for deep exploration of the facts of a phenomenon as well as the participant’s opinions and insights into particular occurrences (Yin, 2009). In this study, in-depth interviews were employed, and in certain cases, participants contributed to the research in more than one phase of the three-phased interview cycle. This allowed time and space for reflection and developing insight for both the interviewer and

interviewee. To maximise the productivity of the interview, Given (2008) advocates behaviours of the interviewer to incorporate active listening which encompasses purposeful interpretations, meaningful interruption for clarification, and reiteration for accuracy.

The interviews were conducted at places of work or study to coincide with the participants' commitments and to maximise convenience for participants. Interviews were conducted in quiet, private and appropriate interview or meeting rooms to ensure an effective process of communication so as to allow the participant to reveal something of the meaning of their world of work or study (Blumer, 1969). The researcher's checklist for the semi-structured individual and group interviews is outlined in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6 Researcher Interview Checklist**

<p>Introductory protocols:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank participants for agreeing to participate in the research.</li> <li>2. Confirm participant's signature on Consent Forms.</li> <li>3. Remind participants that their participation in the research is confidential and that they will only be identified by their role and responsibility rather than by their name.</li> <li>4. Remind participants that the interview will be recorded on an audio recording machine and that a full transcript will be used as data in the research study.</li> </ol>
<p>Interview content focus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Purpose of education</li> <li>2. Purpose of the formalised Values Education program</li> <li>3. Understanding of Socratic Circles theory and practice</li> <li>4. Perceived outcomes of the Socratic Circles for adolescent learners</li> <li>5. Perceived differences between traditional classroom discourse and Socratic Circles dialogue</li> <li>6. Perceived challenges to sustaining educational reform</li> <li>7. Outcomes of the MIIC project</li> <li>8. Invitation to make any general or specific final remarks</li> </ol>
<p>Concluding protocols:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank participants for participation in the research study.</li> <li>• Invitation to participants to participate in follow-up interview, either individual or group.</li> </ul>

Each interview commenced with an introductory protocol that included re-visiting the information letter (See Appendix A) outlining the purpose and nature of the research study and the value of their participation. Signed consent forms were exchanged and the interviewer and interviewee each retained a copy for records. The format of the in-depth interview was

reiterated, and participants were reminded of the nature of the guiding questions as outlined in Table 3.5, a copy of which was sent prior to the interview for perusal. Participants were reminded that the interview would be taped and transcribed and that at any stage in the process they were free to withdraw their consent to participate. Participants were also reminded that their names would not be used; only their roles would be identified in the research.

The questions for both the individual and focus group interviews were developed around the research question. Each interview began with a broad question inviting response about the general aims of education. This introductory question was a consistent feature of all interviews across the three levels of stakeholder interviews. As the interviews ensued, more specific questions elicited responses about the features of the Values Education project according to the nature of the participation in activities and events. At the end of each interview, participants were invited to offer any further remarks on any aspect or theme of the interview.

### **3.5 Data Analysis: A Constant Comparative Analysis Approach**

This study was conducted using a process of data collection which employed a Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) technique supporting a progressive refinement of themes related to the project inquiry and research focus (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). During each phase of the data capture, a specific focus was identified for the in-depth individual and focus group interviews to explore respondent insights on the aims of education, the purpose of the Values Education reform initiative, and the specific aims of the MIIC.

This study led to conceptualisation about the teaching and learning of values using Socratic dialogue in adolescent contexts, through a study of the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders at the three distinct levels of policy planning, development and implementation. This research study sought to understand what the use of an innovative pedagogical strategy could reveal about successful values education specifically and education more broadly.

The data was collected and analysed concurrently. Through a continuous comparative process, the data were analysed, and distinct categories and sub-categories were identified as they emerged. As these distinct categories and sub-categories emerged, relevant literature was sourced and referenced to support the researcher to isolate and reveal significant insights and understandings. The emerging theories related to each category were subjected to further analysis and interrogation through a comparative iterative process of constant comparative analysis. The process of data collection and analysis supports a progressive refinement of themes related to the research focus towards emerging insights (Dye, Schatz &

Coleman, 2000). Each phase of the data capture was guided by a specific focus for the interviews to explore respondent insights related to the case. The process was enacted according to the three levels of investigation at the system – macro; school – meso; and student – micro levels of reform as highlighted in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7 Data Analysis of Three Levels of Education Reform**

Micro-Level	<p>The classroom and student level of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being recipients of the education reform program;</li> <li>• participating in learning and activities;</li> <li>• having ownership over the learning; and</li> <li>• guiding the development of the program through engagement and evaluation.</li> </ul>
Meso-Level	<p>The education system and school administration level of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting education reform initiated by Federal Government and supported by State Government;</li> <li>• appointing key school personnel, including Curriculum Coordinators and senior teachers to administer the program of reform;</li> <li>• allocating resources in accord with timetabling requirements; and</li> <li>• delivering the reform to the targeted student population.</li> </ul>
Macro-Level	<p>The Federal Government, ministerial and bureaucratic level of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• policy-planning based on needs analysis;</li> <li>• design of reform;</li> <li>• allocation of funding;</li> <li>• administration of tendering/application process; and</li> <li>• systematic and strategic guiding and monitoring of reform through statutory agencies and State Education departments.</li> </ul>

The principle of theoretical sampling influenced the three phases of interviewing during the research process. The concept of theoretical sampling is defined as: where the number of cases studied is less important than the potential of each case to provide new insight (O’Donoghue, 2007; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984).

Each participant at the micro-, meso- or macro-level of the Values Education program was cognizant of the workings of the MIIC and provided an informed perspective. Consistent with the principles of theoretical sampling, sequencing of interviews was varied across each of the levels of participant engagement with the MIIC. The purpose was to continue this process until “no genuinely new insights” were yielded by further interviews (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 83).

The analysis and management of data required the structured organisation of the data gathered (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). This involved the organisation of data according to the three levels of stakeholder: macro, meso and micro, and in relation to the overarching and clarifying research questions which guided the content of the data gathered. The process required close attendance to each slice of information, deconstructing or taking the data apart and then reconstructing it through a process of making connections, drawing conclusions and seeking answers in the data in response to research questions (Creswell, 2008). The process required data reduction and interpretation (Marshall & Rosman, 1994; Tesch, 1990). Responses contained ideas which were able to be categorised through the iterative process of constant comparative analysis (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). This was then followed by a process of theorising and a review of literature before the identification of insights and new understandings. This research, by using a constant comparative approach to data collection and analysis, allowed for reflexivity in design, thus enabling the design to be responsive as the research developed and understanding advanced. Modifications were made as new developments emerged and the iterative activity of data collection, analysis and further investigation is deemed beneficial. The refocusing of the research questions to garner even deeper exploration of experiences was supported by reflexivity in the research design (Maxwell, 1996).

### **3.6 Data Management**

The interviews were conducted over several months at each of the three phases of the interview cycle. The researcher used guiding questions (see Table 3.5) in semi-structured interviews and asked qualifying questions to prompt further elaboration drawing on the participants' knowledge and experiences of the Values Education program. The researcher listened to the recordings and made multiple readings of the transcripts of the interviews. Open coding was utilised in the initial readings of the interview transcripts. Rather than simply summarising or describing the responses, open coding is a process which starts with the scrutinising of the interview, line by line. The aim is "to produce concepts that seem to fit the data" (Strauss, 1987, p.28). The natural inclination to impose pre-conceived ideas onto the data is discouraged as the researcher is urged to maintain openness to ideas arising from the data.

Once categories are developed during the process of open coding, they are investigated as to their relevance to the following:

1. phenomena at which the actions and interactions in the domain under study are directed;
2. causal conditions which lead to the occurrence of these phenomena;



3. attributes of the context of the investigated phenomena;
4. additional intervening conditions by which the investigated phenomena are influenced;
5. action and interactional strategies the actors use to handle the phenomena; and
6. the consequences of their actions and interactions (Kelle, 2007).

The information in the Table 3.8 below provides an example of the investigation of categories developed during open coding in order to establish the foundations for theory development. A continual process of analysis and categorisation took place enabling further refinement of major categories. Similar responses were synthesised and differentiation in other responses was acknowledged in each category leading to theorising. A choice was made not to use computer software programs to support analysis which was conducted using thematic categories leading to refinement of new understandings. During the three phases of the data collection, reviews of new and relevant literature offered important critical reflection of emerging theory.

**Table 3.8 Open Coding Example**

Data sample “I had long discussions with people about the purpose and what we were doing and whose values, and all that kind of political stuff to begin with. But, once we got over that, and once people could see well, here was an opportunity, here was a way that we can work together, build a bit of unity around some key priority areas, which I think Values Ed., tends to do almost – it’s almost intuitive. You are talking about safe, purposeful environments. You are talking about engaging students, so people could kind of get that from the beginning, so once we got past the political and got into the actual basis of effective values education, people were wholeheartedly supportive” (GS1, 2012).	
Phenomena	Educational reform in the field of values
Causal conditions	Perceived need for reform; Development of National Framework for learning about values
Context	The politicising of values education along national and party-political lines
Intervening conditions	Change of Federal Government
Action and interactional strategies	Development of pedagogical practice to promote learning of values among adolescent learners
Consequences	Embedding pedagogical practice in Curriculum design and delivery

### 3.7 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research the concept of trustworthiness is particularly important to assure authenticity and reflect a rigorous and methodical approach yielding meaningful and useful results (Nowell et al, 2017). According to an interpretivist paradigm, multiple realities are socially constructed, and the value of this research depends on its true representation of a slice of human experience within this case (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Polit & Beck, 2004). Criteria used to establish trustworthiness and authenticity include:

- Credibility
- Dependability
- Confirmability
- Reflexivity
- Transferability.

Several strategies were engaged to ensure the credibility and interpretation of this research. In an attempt to overcome bias as a Cluster Coordinator because the researcher had been involved in the MIIC as Cluster Coordinator, a Critical Friend was invited to provide feedback on the analysis of data. The Critical Friend was independent of the Cluster project.

Conclusions drawn from analysis of the data were realised through a process of triangulation (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Silverman, 2006). Data were gathered from three source groups across three levels of educational influence and experience through individual and focus group interviews. The process of corroborating evidence from individuals within and across groups, enabled verification of themes and theories towards a more accurate and credible research study (Creswell, 2012). This principle of verification of themes and theories is explored in detail through the presentation of results data in Chapter 5.

In this research dependability was established through the audio recording and accurate transcription of interviews, concurrent comparative analysis, the initial open coding of the data and development of categories and sub-categories, and the continuous process of theorising and refinement of emerging theory. The keeping of detailed field notes, high quality recording and accurate transcription of interviews supported the dependability of the research study.

In order to ensure that the research was conducted in an objective fashion, confirmability was used as a strategy by applying reflexivity (Anfara et al., 2002). This was achieved by checking and rechecking the data throughout the study, conducting a data audit examining the

data collection processes and analysis procedures with a deliberate attention to any potential for bias or distortion (Trochim, 2006).

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research can be replicated in other contexts and the research findings can be understood by others. Detailed descriptions are necessary as they provide information about the selected participants and the nature of the setting and context being investigated. Transferability ensures that others can benefit from the research findings and theory generated. In this research study, the researcher provided details of the genesis, background and context of the study. The consistent reference to relevant literature during the process of data collection and analysis supported the transferability of the findings of the study.

The intention of this research was to explore the human experience of the case and as such, thick description was created to give detail and dimension to that experience as lived by the individuals from a variety of perspectives (Creswell, 2012; Bachman & Schutt, 2008). The transferability of the findings of this research is the responsibility of the reader rather than the original researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Through the application of the strategy of fairness, authenticity and trustworthiness is realised. Under these broad categories, the application of fairness behoves the researcher to consider the data carefully in a balanced and detached manner. This is also achieved through the balance of methodologies used and considerations of the limitations of the evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Authenticity was developed through engaging with transparent processes in this research ensuring documentation in this thesis are publicly available (Anfara et al., 2002).

### **3.8 Role of the Researcher**

Given the interpretative nature of qualitative research, the identification of “biases, values and judgements of the researcher warrant being stated explicitly in the research report” (Creswell, 1994, p. 147). The researcher reports the experiences and perceptions of the participants expressed through the responses of the participants during the interview process. Although the researcher was a part of the study, the researcher’s voice did not feature until the conclusion of the interviews and attempts were made to suspend the preconceptions of the researcher.

Consistent with an epistemology of Constructionism, and noteworthy in a discussion about the role of the researcher, Guba asserts that “realities are taken to exist in the form of

multiple mental constructions that are socially and experientially based, local and specific; and dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them” (1990, p. 27). The researcher works to understand and interpret the meaning of the lived experience and social interactions of the multiple participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196).

This research was undertaken within educational research relating to affective learning, more specifically, the teaching and learning of values. As a literacy teacher with a particular interest in classroom discourse and Socratic dialogue, the researcher was interested in exploring the significance of using the Socratic Circles Pedagogy to promote values understanding and demonstration in an intercultural and interfaith context. The researcher was motivated by a perceived need to guide future educational policy and curriculum design. Additionally, the researcher of a qualitative inquiry acknowledges that the research explores “multiple and overlapping communities of practice” (Preissle, 2006, p. 692), more than one of which the researcher was a member.

The researcher has had considerable experience in literacy and language education through working in metropolitan, regional and remote area schools with diverse student populations including Aboriginal populations. The need to teach oral language and formal speaking skills explicitly is acknowledged and has driven the use of innovative pedagogy including the widespread and regular use of Socratic Circles discussion across year levels and various subject areas. The researcher has also delivered professional learning in literacy pedagogy and Socratic dialogue to educators across the three sectors of the education system.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

All ethical considerations accorded with the processes and procedures as set forth by the Australian Catholic University (ACU, 2019). The study was granted ethical approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the ACU. Consent for participation in interviews was canvassed and obtained from all respondents prior to the conducting of interviews (Appendix A). Principals at the participants’ schools were contacted to obtain permission to allow staff members to participate in the research study. Letters were then sent to prospective participants inviting them to participate in the study. The context and purpose of the research was outlined and explained in a detailed information letter. The type, nature and procedures for the interviews were explained in full. Samples of both the Information Letter and Consent Forms are provided in the Appendices.

### **3.10 Limitations**

As this case study relates to one particular setting, a cluster of five schools, within the overall National Values Education initiative, it cannot be used to generalise the findings (Yin, 2003, p. 37). Further, the inability to gather data from senior Government politicians authorising the Values Education project meant that policy interpretation and perspective was restricted to documentary evidence and executive government and system authority personnel. Finally, the potential influence associated with the researcher's bias and interpretation of the data is acknowledged (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 309). Notwithstanding, strategies to address such bias were advanced through the processes of data triangulation.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

This research study investigates the experience and perceptions of key stakeholders in the second phase of the Australian National Values Education reform. It documents the theory emerging from the data collected and analysed during three distinct phases of the interview process using a case study approach. Participants were selected from the three levels of involvement. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate data collection approach to achieve the aims of the study. The insights and emerging theory resulted from the cyclical process of data collection, data analysis, returning to data collection, further data analysis and so forth in an iterative process.

## Chapter 4 The Case – Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster

This chapter provides an overview of the context of this case study; the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster (MIIC) in the Values Education reform effort implemented by the Commonwealth Government of Australia in the period 2002–2010. The MIIC was a funded project as part of the *National Framework for Values Education: Values Education Good Practice Schools – Stage 2* (VEGPS). The central aim of the MIIC was to provide opportunities for young people from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds to meet to discuss social issues related to identity, culture, race and ethnicity and their impact on social cohesion.

The formal initiative of Values Education in Australia was part of an international movement to examine the place of values learning in schools. In March 2004, the United Kingdom (UK) Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) published a report, *Promoting and Evaluating Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development*. The report was a revision of a booklet originally published in November 2001 and used to guide school inspectors. It underscored the role of education as being for the whole person which is a hallmark of learning policy and delivery. Ofsted undertook an extensive process of consultation, canvassing the ideas and opinions of key stakeholders: legislators, representatives of professional, religious and secular organisations, members of religious communities, academics, inspectors, parents and students. The policy imperative of SMSC development in UK schools follows from legislation passed in 1988. The Education Reform Act 1988 asserted that school curriculum should promote “the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society” (United Kingdom Education Reform Act [ERA], 1988, 351 (1) [a]).

In addition, the Act stated that curriculum should prepare students for the “opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life” (UKERA, 1988, 351 (1) [b]). In July 1996, a debate was conducted in the House of Lords which emphasised the need to set out “those values schools should impart to pupils” (UKERA, 1988, s.1). This led to significant initiatives in the areas of personal, social and health education, citizenship, sex and relationship education, drug education and careers education.

In 2004, the Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the House of Commons published the *Sixth Report of*

*Session 2003–04* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004). The document reported on its 12-month investigation into social cohesion which had been triggered by racial tensions in the towns of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley in 2001. The committee was adamant that the challenges to community peace should not simply be dealt with from a law and order point of view. In its conclusions and recommendations, the committee issued a directive to Ofsted to consider and assess social cohesion in its terms of reference for school inspection.

At the same time that the UK was highlighting the key role of education in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the child, South Africa was exploring the place of values education after apartheid, the policy that governed relations between the white minority and the Black majority of South Africa during the 20th century. Pendlebury and Enslin (2007) documented an expansive approach to values education. Beginning with the publication of South Africa's *Manifesto on Values Education and Democracy* (Gevisser, Morris, & James, 2001), and continuing with the provision of comprehensive curriculum support, schools were being guided to play a significant role in promoting the demonstration of democratic and civic values among their communities. This departmental directive was a reflection of the belief that education is a key to societal change.

#### **4.1 The Researcher/Practitioner**

In 2005, I was asked by the Curriculum Coordinator to review material on a new teaching method in the field of literature, Socratic Circles (Copeland, 2005). I was approached to work as coach/mentor to support a graduate teacher with a disengaged and disrupted Year 10 English class. Having familiarised myself with the philosophy and structure of Socratic Circles, I decided to model the pedagogy for the graduate teacher with the intention of addressing some of the behavioural and learning challenges evident in the class group. As well as the behavioural issues presenting a barrier to learning, students were experiencing difficulties in understanding the language and content of the Shakespearean play *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1999). Socratic Circles proved to be an appropriate pedagogical choice for the group of students, increasing the level of knowledge and participation in discussion about the text and promoting self-awareness and self-management. In coaching conversations I led with the graduate teacher, we both agreed that Socratic Circles supported understanding of the content of the text and helped students prepare for their examination, an extended written analytical response to the text. The Socratic Circles methodology enabled students to explore the features of the text in a disciplined manner. Additionally, students were observed demonstrating more respectful classroom behaviour and were considerably more task-oriented as a group.

In 2006, I was approached by the Deputy Principal to develop a proposal, and canvas interest from other schools in joining a cluster of schools to apply for funding as part of the Federal Government's Values Education Good Practice Schools – Stage 2 project. Having felt considerable disquiet about the Cronulla race riots of December 2005, I imagined a thoughtful and positive response that became the proposal for an interfaith intercultural project. I invited four other schools to join St. Monica's College, a co-educational Catholic school, in the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster: An Independent Islamic college, an Independent Jewish school, a Government high school and a Catholic girls' school. Over six years, including three years of the funded project, I coordinated 20 interschool gatherings bringing together students from the diverse range of schools and involving other schools in the process. Some of the materials developed in the project are still available through the Immigration Museum online teacher resources (MIIC, 2009).

#### **4.2 Social and Political Context and Catalyst**

The social and political context was the catalyst for the establishment of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster. A recognition of the impact of the increasing polarisation of perspectives globally and locally, prompted consideration of an educational response (Rizvi, 2004). For example, the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 signalled a seismic shift in the global socio-political landscape because:

Not only did it spawn the American "war on terrorism" and associated conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, it also raised serious questions about the future of the world, about unrestrained and elusive transnational terrorism, and about how the terrorist threat to the global community could be contained. (Kramer & Yetiv, 2007, p. 409)

The subsequent terrorist attacks in cities around the world since September 11 have contributed to a changed cultural reality and given rise to neo-conservative perspectives in Australian and international politics.

Nationally, it was events that took place in New South Wales (NSW) in 2005 that sparked renewed debate about the merits of multiculturalism. In December 2005 the ongoing tensions between local Cronulla beachgoers and visitors to the beach reached a violent culmination. What has become known as the Cronulla riots was a series of violent altercations between predominantly Anglo-European Australians and predominantly Muslim Lebanese Australians.



The race-based riots played an important part as a catalyst for the conception and establishment of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster in 2006. As such, it is of importance to describe both the nature of and reaction to these riots. Many commentators characterised the riots as retaliation for the violent assault on two volunteer lifesavers at Cronulla, a beachside suburb south of Sydney, New South Wales (Case Study 4: The Cronulla riots, Journalism in Multicultural Australia Project, 2006). The actions were not viewed as merely criminal behaviour on the part of two individuals, but as a collective affront to what was termed the Australian way of life. The ambiguous notion of an Australian identity was debated by social commentators and the general public in the context of a broader conversation about values.

The reporting of the Cronulla riots comprised sustained editorials and letters to the editor and included a diverse range of views expressed by members of the community as well as political leaders, including federal and state government ministers (Cronulla Riots, *The Australian*, 2005b; Murphey & Davies, 2005). The initial riots and retaliatory attacks were widely reported nationally leading to a public debate about race, multiculturalism and the Australian community. The nationalist flavour of some participants in the conflict drew condemnation from the then Premier of New South Wales, The Hon. Morris Iemma, who, as reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (“Neo-Nazis in race riots”, 2005), accused rioters of trying to “hide behind the Australian flag”. Also quoted in this article is the Police Minister’s assertion that “there appears to be an element of white supremacists and they really have no place in mainstream Australian society.” The then Prime Minister, The Hon. John Howard, stated:

I do not accept there is underlying racism in this country. I have always taken a more optimistic view of the character of the Australian people. Attacking people on the basis of their race, their appearance, their ethnicity is totally unacceptable and should be repudiated by all Australians irrespective of their own backgrounds and their politics. (Davies, A & Peatling, S., 2005)

The then Opposition Leader, The Hon. Kim Beasley, concurred by denying inherent racism in Australia and arguing that a feature of Australian identity was “respect for each other and respect for the rule of law” (*The Australian*, December 13, 2005). Many blamed the escalation of racist responses to the riots on some instances of inflammatory rhetoric in the media. At the time, talkback radio was inundated with responses to the events. Waleed Aly, from the Islamic Council of Victoria, asserted that the race riots were much less likely to

eventuate in Melbourne because it did not have the segregated enclaves evident in some Sydney suburbs (Cronulla Riots, *The Australian*, December 12, 2005a).

Following the riots and subsequent retaliations, the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Training (NDET) disseminated a directive to all school Principals emphasising “the responsibility of schools in condemning racism and promoting cultural diversity” (NDET, 2005). It has been posited that in theory “Every conflict and/or crises can be traced to a certain level of Xenophobic attitude of a cultural group which normally imposes its authority through acts of terror” (Boaduo, Milondzo, & Adjei, 2009, p. 260).

Education has the potential to address the kinds of thinking and behaving that leads to conflict and to proactively educate to prevent destructive habits from forming. To this end, a re-engagement with the enduring and evolving aims of education provides hope for genuine and sustained social cohesion and is captured in the following quotation,

The basic significant aim of any form of education, be it formal or informal, it to transform the educated into responsible, progressive, dynamic, and reasonable individuals who would be able to play a role in the advancement of humankind; through the transfer of societal, traditional and cultural norms and values. (Boaduo et al., 2009, p. 260)

The second phase of the Values Education project underscored the importance of intercultural understanding for the development of a cohesive society. The establishment of the MIIC was a response to this objective.

### **4.3 A National Context for Values Education**

A study commissioned by the Australian Commonwealth Government and conducted in the mid-1990s arrived at the conclusion that state and territory government curriculum programs were not responding adequately to the need for Australian students to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for them to participate in the democratic process as fully informed and active citizens (Brown, 2007). Informed by these findings, the federal government began to play a more interventionist role in guiding curriculum development in the area of citizenship. Both the Keating Government and then the Howard Government supported various civics and citizenship initiatives, most notably the *Discovering Democracy* program, which has been credited with reinvigorating citizenship in education in this country.

The preamble of *The Adelaide Declaration of National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MCEETYA, 1999) outlined a vision for an educated, just and open

society. It asserted that such a community is dependent upon each individual, “having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life” (MCEETYA, 1999, p. i).

The Adelaide Declaration set out a structure for national cooperation and collaboration for improvement in schooling. Notably, it identified the importance of development in the areas of intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic capacity (MCEETYA, 1999, Preamble). The Adelaide Declaration placed emphasis on an expectation that all schools teach democratic values. Students, upon leaving school should have developed “the capacity to exercise judgment and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice” (MCEETYA, 1999, s. 1.3).

In 2002, the then Minister for Education, The Hon. Brendan Nelson, commissioned the Values Education study. He had the support of all the state and territory ministers. The purpose of the study was to allow schools to refine their policies and practices around values education and inform other schools about methods for improving the provision of values education. However, controversy loomed. In January 2004, remarks made by the then Prime Minister, The Hon. John Howard, were to ignite a bitter cultural debate about the nature of values and values education. Prime Minister Howard was commenting on the increase in enrolments in private schools compared with that in state schools during the period from 1999–2002. He asserted that there had been more than a 20% increase in private school enrolments compared to only a 1% increase in government schools (The Age, 2004, Jan 20). He remarked that many parents were moving their children out of government schools because they felt that the state system was “too politically correct and too values-neutral” (PM Queries Values of State Schools, 2004). His comment was perceived by some as an affront to public education and to the teachers and administrators of state schools. The Victorian Independent Education Union described Mr Howard’s comments as “divisive and nonsense” (Howard’s comments on schools derided, 2004). Strong opposition also came from the Australian Education Union, who argued that, “...(f)ar from being values-neutral, public schools are where children learn the values of resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility, equity and social justice” (Durbridge, 2004).

The Federal Government used the findings of the Values Education Study: Final Report (Curriculum Corporation [Australia] & Australia, DEST, 2003) to inform a set of principles and the *National Framework for Values Education in all Australian Schools* (DEST, 2005). The study provided an instructive snapshot of strategies and approaches to values education

that became a foundation for the National Framework for Values Education in Australia, the first formalised national program of values education in this country. Initially, schools were directed to display the *Values for Australian Schooling* poster in a prominent place. However, for some schools, this gesture may have been the only link with the national program as there were no further accountability measures for implementation of the program.

For those schools who were interested in exploring the National Framework for Values Education further, funding was provided to support clusters of schools to use innovative practice in approaches to Values Education (Curriculum Corporation, 2008). The first stage of the *Values Education Good Practice Schools Project* commenced in 2005 with the selection of 26 selected clusters, comprising 166 schools and encompassing all Australian school contexts.

The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project–Stage 2 supported 25 clusters of schools involved in action research related to the Nine Values for Australian Schooling (DEST, 2005). The *Final Report, At the Heart of What We Do–Values Education at the Centre of Schooling* (DEEWR, 2008) is an account of the experience and learning from this stage of the project. The clusters pursued a variety of approaches in their implementation of the National Framework and became exemplars for other schools initiating Values Education programs.

The Values in Action 2008–2009–Stage 3 of the Values Education Program outlined as its aim to make Values Education a core part of schooling. The program included funding for professional learning, implementation of good practice projects by clusters of schools, development of a Values Education website, a national conference, national partnerships projects with school community members, and targeted research (Gillard, 2009).

The Curriculum Corporation, now known as Education Services Australia (ESA), was the statutory authority assigned the role of supporting the delivery of the project in clusters of schools across Australia. The Curriculum Corporation was tasked with the management of the initial study commissioned by the Australian Government to initiate a review of values in education in Australian schools. The Curriculum Corporation then assembled data from the Values Education projects conducted in schools funded by special grants. The *Values Education Study: Final Report* (DEST, 2003a) concluded that though values education was evident in many government and non-government schools, comprehensive values education was still in its infancy in most Australian schools. The report by the Curriculum Corporation was significant in providing a set of recommendations and outlining a *Draft National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (DEST, 2003b).

As a response to the Values Education Study, the Australian Government made a substantial financial commitment of \$AU29.7 million to fund a comprehensive program which aspired to make values education an essential part of Australian schooling. The program, directed, coordinated, evaluated and reported upon by the Curriculum Corporation comprised the following features:

- School-based values education forums;
- A school grants project in two stages to identify and disseminate good practice in values education;
- A three-stage curriculum and professional learning resource development project;
- A website;
- Annual national values education forums; and
- Partnership projects with other stakeholders including principals, parents, professional teacher associations and teacher educators (DEEWR, 2008).

#### **4.4 A Victorian Context for Values Education**

The ability of a student to ask analytical questions is an integral skill which was outlined in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) document in the disciplinary domains of English, History and Science (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2005). The VELS outlined the need to teach communication skills by devoting a Domain to Communication within the Interdisciplinary Standard. The Dimension of Speaking and Listening emphasises the necessity to teach oral language skills explicitly. The Victorian Curriculum iteration of the Australian Curriculum includes progression of learning and capability in Personal and Social learning and Critical and Creative thinking (VCAA, 2016). Socratic Circles, the pedagogical choice for the learning experiences in the MIIC, is a teaching strategy that has a dual purpose of teaching the content of the curriculum as well as the transferable skills of communication for lifelong learning and is the focus of the exploration of this research.

#### **4.5 Socratic Circles as a Pedagogical Approach to Values Education**

The seminal Carnegie Report (Carnegie Corporation, 1996) recognised that intellectual development is a key aim of education, but accented the broader learning possibilities related to the skills of communication, empathy, reflection and self-management. An element of learning frequently underestimated is that it connects with the student self, and student self-knowing (Habermas, 1990). A whole school approach to any learning program or initiative is crucial to the longevity and efficacy of the reform (DEEWR, 2008, p. 9).

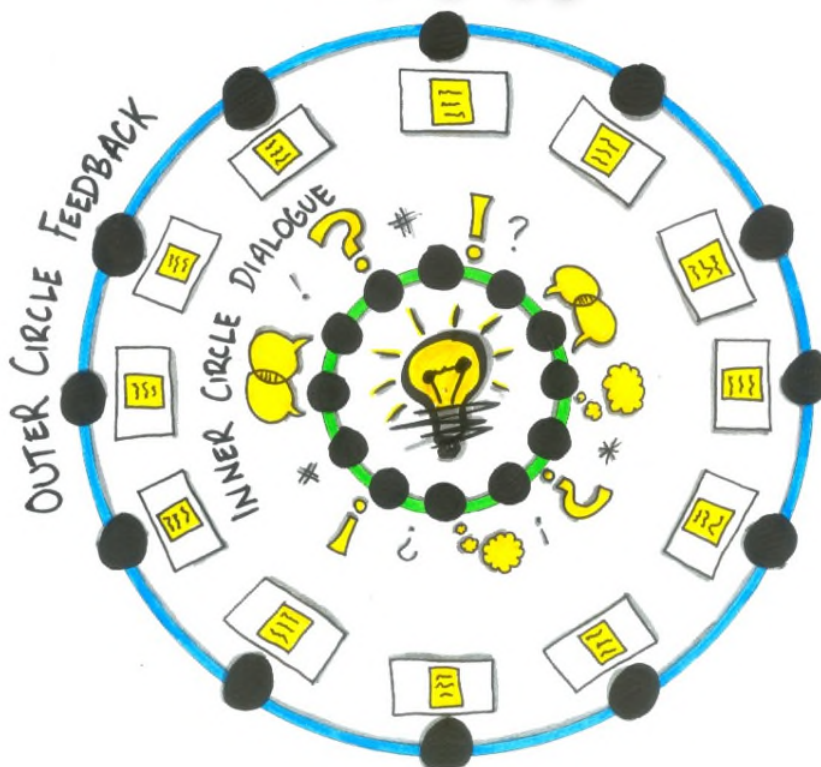
Socratic Circles as a pedagogical approach was developed by the American English teacher Matt Copeland in response to disengagement of teenage students in his Literature class (Copeland, 2005). As a methodology for classroom discussion, its main application has been in the area of literature analysis. It is a development of the Socratic methods of dialogue and questioning based on the Socratic theory of knowledge that learning takes place best through disciplined conversation (Copeland, 2005). Socratic seminars centre on a text and invite the participants rather than the leader, to conduct an intellectual conversation which is essentially exploratory. Copeland (2005) believes that classroom activity should not always focus on learners knowing the correct answers, but on their developing the skill to ask the right questions. Paul and Elder (2006) noted that answers suggest an end to a thought or thinking, an absolute or finality to the thinking process, whereas questions generate the continuation of thought allowing for further exploration and understanding.

The Socratic Circles structure (Figure 4.1) involves organising students into two concentric circles. The inner circle being the discussion group and the outer circle, the feedback group. Students respond to a prompt question based on stimulus material disseminated prior to the dialogue, allowing for individual study, analysis and reflection. Students are supported in their learning to prepare a commentary and questions for the dialogue and are scaffolded through the process, receiving direct instruction related to analytical reading of texts and providing constructive peer feedback (See Appendix D for examples of resources for scaffolded tasks). The inner circle begins the discussion with participants responding to each other's prepared questions and contributing ideas and opinions based on their close reading of the material. The addition of the feedback outer circle element promotes active listening as students observe and listen to their peers as they prepare to share constructive, growth-focused feedback after the dialogue.

Figure 4.1 Example of Socratic Circles structure.

# SOCRATIC CIRCLES

## Pedagogy



The teachers involved in the MIIC project were supported with professional learning in the use of Socratic Circles pedagogy as the teacher's skill in questioning is also particularly pertinent in any discussion of values. One of the purposes of questioning students is to assist them to develop their understanding of attitudes and values (Copeland, 2005). The Socratic Circles Rubric (See Appendix B), provided a guide to both teachers and students for self, peer and teacher evaluation as it includes descriptors for the successful criteria of outstanding feedback; namely, "... (c)omments indicate very accurate and perceptive listening" (Copeland, 2005, p. 132).

The ability of a student to ask analytical questions is an integral skill as outlined in the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) document in the disciplinary domains of English, History and Science (VCAA, 2018). The Victorian Curriculum outlines the need to teach communication skills elaborated in the English curriculum and the Capabilities curriculum, specifically related to Personal and Social Capability and Critical and

Creative Thinking. In the English curriculum, the Speaking and Listening mode of using language emphasises the necessity to teach oral language skills explicitly. Socratic Circles is a teaching approach which supports the teaching of curriculum content while concurrently developing transferable skills of communication for lifelong learning.

The governing process of the Socratic Circles learning strategy follows the notable schema employed in the Living Values Educational Program (LVEP) at Aventura City of Excellence School (Shea & Murphy, 2009). Students, in response to various values stimuli, receive information, reflect internally on the meaning of that information and then explore the associated values which are either inherent or ascribed. Understandings, beliefs and perspectives are questioned and tested within the group discussion through a series of questions. Setting a safe space for discussion and exploration of ideas is a critical feature of any values education process. According to Tillman (2005), the LVEP schema can be used across cultures as the transferable nature of the open-ended questioning practice allows students to explore values and the different cultural contexts in which they are expressed.

At the heart of each individual's value system are certain areas of value to which one attaches significance. In his formative work, Hill (1991) categorises these areas as:

- beliefs concerning the aesthetic quality of personal experience, from which we derive our aesthetic values;
- beliefs about those areas of knowledge which contribute most directly, in an instrumental/technological sense, to our health and physical survival;
- moral beliefs about the way we ought to act towards other living beings;
- religious beliefs about the meaning of human existence in relation to the cosmos; and
- political beliefs about the way human groups are and should be organised (Hill, 1991, p. 6).

Socratic Circles discussions typically focus on one or more of these aspects of experience and understanding using texts from a variety of genres. Through a focus on these key texts, students examine their own and others' beliefs.

#### **4.6 Intentionality of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster**

Initially, it was important to convene Cluster meetings with the School Values Education Coordinators from each of the five participating schools, to establish a shared vision for the project, distil the aims of the project and plan for educative and meaningful inter-school student gatherings. At the first meeting of the group of lead teachers, a student artist from one



of the schools was invited to attend and take notes with the intention of creating an artwork to capture the essence of the aspirations of the project. The student then used her notes from the meeting and created an artwork using acrylic paints on canvas. This artwork became the visual metaphor for the project. The artwork (See Figure 4.2) was described by the student in an artist's statement.

*Figure 4.2 Student artwork capturing the aims of MIIC through visual metaphor.*



Artist Statement: The tree represents growth. The five branches become hands representing the five schools involved in the project. The hands hold the earth of which we are all citizens. The circle of figures with indistinguishable features who hold each other's hands around the tree represent the Socratic Circles method of discussion which will help us to be open to the ideas and experiences of others. The sunrise is symbolic of a new beginning as this project is the beginning of new and hopeful relationships.

Early in the project planning the teacher coordinators wondered about the potentially controversial nature of some values-related issues. The group ruminated about whether the staff and students would be open to genuine dialogue which could surface polarising views. Would the students involved have the requisite characteristics of open-mindedness and open-heartedness for the endeavour to be positive and growth-focused? Should parameters be placed around the kinds of topics/issues for discussion? The decision was made to use engaging provocations for dialogue and trust the Socratic Circles process to provide a structure which

has the potential to objectify conflict and cultivate respectful communication and relationships. Students participated in numerous Socratic Circles discussions examining issues and negotiating meaning related to values.

During the project, the Cluster engaged with public organisations including the Koorie Heritage Trust, Immigration Museum, Federation Square, The State Library of Victoria and the Northern Interfaith Dialogue Group. A partnership with The Immigration Museum was formalised in 2009 connected to Melbourne's hosting of the International Parliament of World Religions. The MIIC held gatherings at the museum and developed resources for other schools and the broader community to view and use under the title of *Talking Faiths* (MIIC, 2009).

A student executive was formed comprising twenty student leaders with four students from each of the five cluster schools to encourage student voice and agency in decision-making about the kinds of learning experiences connected to the Socratic Circles discussion. The student executive met on numerous occasions during the duration of the project. One of the student executive suggestions was to incorporate drama and music as well as art into the interschool gatherings. Students created and performed drama presentations based on stories of immigration drawn from personal experience and including the themes emerging through the Socratic Circles dialogue. On one occasion, performing in front of 21 visiting schools to the project, students performed *Story of Journey*. This dramatic piece of writing inspired one student to write music, a piece called *Sadness* (See Figure 5.2), which was performed by three musicians from three of the schools in the MIIC.

The purpose of the MIIC was to create a diverse community of learners, to explore significant social realities and consider the underlying causes of polarising issues and problematic assumptions about identity and culture. The overarching intention of the MIIC was to explore, through dialogue and relationships, the values of understanding, responsibility and freedom towards social inclusion.

#### **4.7 Next Chapters**

Chapter Five examines the responses of the participants at the three levels of data collection. The results and emergent findings will be illuminated, and further analysis provided in Chapter Six.

## Chapter 5 Results

This chapter presents the responses of participants in the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster (MIIC) and key stakeholders in the National Values Education project 2006–2008. The responses of participants across the three levels of engagement: the macro - system; the meso - school; and, the micro - student, are presented. The perspectives of 30 participants across three project phases and operating at three levels of engagement were gathered to identify the applicability of Socratic Circles Pedagogy to achieve a considered depth of understanding of values.

### 5.1 Data Collection Process

The process of data collection employed a Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) inductive coding technique which enabled a progressive refinement of respondent themes that the researcher identifies as significant to the project's focus-of-inquiry (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000, January). Each phase of the data capture employed a specific focus where the in-depth individual and focus group interviews explored respondent insights on the aims of education, the purpose of the Values Education reform initiative, and the specific aims of the MIIC.

The central research question; *To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?* guided the development of focus interview questions posed to explore the experience of the MIIC by the three levels of stakeholders. Specifically, the interviews conducted sought to discover:

1. How the aims of education were perceived by the stakeholders within the MIIC?
2. How were these aims reflected in the aims of the Values Education reform initiative (Focus A); and, specifically achieved through the work of the MIIC (Focus B)?
3. How was the Socratic Circles pedagogical method used in the project; and, how did participants experience learning through this form of dialogue (Focus C)?

Each of the individual and focus group interviews held a key focus and was initiated by clarifying and guiding interview questions (see Table 3.5). The three key focus areas; the Aims of Education (Focus A), MIIC Outcomes & Socratic Circles applicability (Focus B) and, Socratic Circles Pedagogy (Focus C) are explored in the following sections.

## 5.2 Focus A: The Aims of Education

In the context of this study, the aims of education are growth-based, “all one with growing” (Dewey, 1916, Part 4, Summary). Within an educational environment which is naturally social and developmental, education is a fostering, nurturing and cultivating process that is mediated through communication. It is within this communicative process that potentially transformative elements can be experienced (1916, p.6). Moreover, through joint learning experiences, learners can experience growth in their knowledge, understanding and social capacity, a key tenet of Article 29 of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989). The initial interviews focused on how the aims of education were perceived by stakeholders representing the three levels of the education system.

### 5.2.1 *Student Perspectives on the Aims of Education*

At the micro-level of engagement, students identified two distinct aims of education. They first acknowledged the functional and academic aims of education to equip them with the knowledge and skills required for a purposeful life, an education in citizenship and participation in society. Secondly, the students acknowledged the values inherent in educational processes that promote certain kinds of interactions between individuals and groups.

#### **Knowledge and skills**

The initial response of students confirmed a primary aim of education as being instruction in the knowledge of key discipline areas. Students<sup>1</sup>, gave expression to this perception in various way. For example, ST4 suggested that “the aim of education is to provide us with the basics that we need to achieve what we want in life” (2012), while ST6 stated that the primary aim is “general, like maths and English, the general skills that you would need to have in the world ...the aim of education is to inform and educate” (2012) and ST5 remarks that “a part of that would be you need to be able to fully write and do simple maths and be able to understand dialogue and conversation” (2012). A more complete response was offered by ST2 elaborating the purpose of learning: “with learning comes knowledge. When you know something it’s a lot easier to make informed decisions and opinions about it” (ST2, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Each student respondent was designated a participant number and is denoted in-text with ST(x)

### **Social formation**

Beyond the formal attributions of educational achievement through cognitive development, an emphasis on the role of education as a formative social experience was apparent. The students expressed an understanding of educational aims as being multi-faceted, including an aim to prepare individuals to integrate and function as members of society. Expanding on this notion “Not only a functioning member, but maybe changing it in a way, leading it, adding their - contributing their own way of life” (ST5, 2012). This sentiment by ST5 was extended to the concept of preparation as a contributing member of society: “who will do good things” (ST5, 2012).

There was also a perception that education aims to provide a platform for developing an open-mindedness about the broader society expressed in educational terms as “making everyone aware of the world around them, of what is important, what should be focused on in the world” (ST6, 2012). As ST3 opined, “It’s not just about, what you know, but how you know it and how you, kind of, react to adult situations” (2011) with ST1 recognising “there’s probably a deeper level of teaching about values and what is right or good, things like that, that are less tangible” (ST1, 2011).

These broad educational aims are shown to be understood to pertain to more varied interactions with others and the world, with “the point of it is to be able to learn and increase your knowledge about the world” (ST2, 2011). This knowledge development and the role of schools in achieving these aims were acknowledged; “It’s in the schools that we develop what we use later on” (ST4, 2012). The categorisation and sub-categorisation of responses by students to the enduring aims of education can be summarised as a commitment to developing and expanding an individual’s knowledge progressively alongside a deepening awareness of the wider world and the requisite skills to participate in that world, in a constructive and meaningful way.

#### ***5.2.2 Leader and Teacher Perspectives on the Aims of Education***

The responses of the teachers<sup>2</sup> and school leaders of the MIIC cluster schools revealed three overarching themes reflective as inherent to the aims of education; core skills, lifelong learning and citizenship. These key themes in the responses represent the predominant view by

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<sup>2</sup> Each school leader and teacher respondent was designated a participant number and is denoted in-text with LT(x)

the participants that the aims of education are to develop the individual to engage a changing world, and to inculcate values that influence social engagement. Alongside this generalised viewpoint, several other themes were highlighted by participants that reflect the richness of insights within the data set.

### **Core skills**

The academic imperative to teach core knowledge and skills to prepare students for completion of school for further opportunities is articulated as one part of the complexity of educational mission. In addition, building character and instilling values is noted as integral “values like respect, compassion, empathy, treating others as you would want to be treated, and also instil some confidence in them, so that they can easily stand up and speak on their own feet on anything” (LT8, 2012).

The belief that educators are obliged to teach critical thinking rather than only impart knowledge was expressed; “we can really be influenced poorly by people who have an argument to run, so people do need to critically look at that situation” (LT2, 2011). Analytical skills were emphasised as necessary for navigating citizenship in the twenty-first century. The reality of a globalised world, one in which global citizens are more interactive, communicative and connected was argued to impact on the purpose of education, hence the need for “people to be critical in terms of what they receive... whether it be from media or other people or areas” (LT2, 2011).

Developing in students the capacities of an international citizen was identified as core to the purpose of contemporary schooling as reflected in the response by LT3 “but beyond reading and writing...how to understand their role in what is now becoming the world as opposed to the community” (LT3, 2011).

The purpose of education was understood to maximise individual learning potential and develop different dimensions of self to achieve well-roundedness of character, expressed as: “education is about providing the opportunities for an individual person to be the best they can be, to maximise their learning potential as an individual - not only an academic aim, it is producing a...well-rounded person” (LT4, 2011).

### **Lifelong learning and citizenship**

The potential of education to have an expansive, liberating effect on the individual is elucidated and explored in the broader context of global citizenry: “to be effective global citizens who can contribute to an enhanced humanity and an enhanced human race and a better

future for everybody and everything” (LT5, 2011). Connections were made between the values in focus and identification as global citizens, “not just citizens of our school or not just citizens of their own home or their little community but the broader, wider community and most importantly the world” (LT7, 2012).

The concept of lifelong learning was expressed as being significant and the kinds of learning activities which characterised the work of the MIIC were interpretive in nature. That is, students through the regular analysis of thought-provoking texts examined the workings of society from a values perspective developing the capacity to learn deeply. This is understood as contributing to lifelong learning attitude and disposition, “leading through their stages of development right through to end of life as well” (LT2, 2011).

The role of schools in teaching values is understood to be much more crucial as schools are acknowledged as playing an increasingly influential role in socialisation. LT4 observes that “I think we’re moved from being a body that might reinforce parental and societal values to, increasingly, the body which actually teaches values” (LT4, 2011). The demands placed upon schools to educate about emerging social concerns and issues are ever-increasing and is reflected in LT4’s claim that “Every time an issue arises it’s ‘Get the schools to do it!’ And I suppose that is because we are the only institution where a large number of young people congregate and are a captive audience” (2011).

A clear focus on relational learning rather than detached instruction was argued to be conducive to the learning of values. The notion of *walking the talk* and not simply paying lip service to school mission and vision statements was underscored and summarised in LT1’s conversation that “you have to live values. People have to feel that the values are happening in schools...the best way is to introduce changes in values education in a non-formal way” (LT1, 2011).

### 5.2.3 *Government and System Perspectives on the Aims of Education*

The responses by educational managers <sup>3</sup> and project officers in the government and non-government education systems revealed nine key features recognised as reflective of the aims of education:

- Knowledge and skills
- Community membership
- Preparation for workplace
- Role of schools in inculcating values
- Values at the centre of every educational endeavour
- Schools supporting democratic values
- Learning information and experiencing formation
- Opportunities for depolarising conflict
- Engendering interfaith and intercultural understanding.

These features represent an understanding of education as a lifelong process with formal schooling as a foundational stage in that process. Education was perceived as integral to the maturation process, the acquisition of key attributes, knowledge and skills to cope in the world as an adult and to contribute to the world in a meaningful way. Moreover, learning was not seen as something that was primarily instructionally directive, but as a process in which students are active participants. The notion of engagement reflects an understanding of education as a dynamic exchange as understood by system leaders and influencers such as GS5, who asserted that “education for younger people is about maturing into adulthood, and about acquiring the skills...the attitude, knowledge and skills to manage in the world of the adult” (2012), and who went on to say “I don’t see education as being totally a school-based thing...it is a process of change and expansion of your capacity to understand who you are in the world that you are in and it’s about knowledge, accumulation of knowledge” (GS5, 2012). Education is understood as a lifelong endeavour and for young people their early experience of education lays a foundation for subsequent educational experiences in which they can be active participants “to ensure that all people can enjoy success in education, that all people feel that they can benefit from being engaged with education” (GS1, 2011).

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<sup>3</sup> Each government and systems focused respondent was designated a participant number and is denoted in-text with GS(x)



The connection was drawn between experiences of achievement at school and access to the workplace and other experiences. Education was characterised as agency. The reality of an exponentially changing workplace necessitates in twenty-first century learners the development of skills of discrimination, analysis and critical thinking. An education which acknowledges this reality prepares students to work and contribute successfully as emphasised at a system level. GS4 reflected that whilst basic skills in literacy and numeracy are necessary, young people need to develop “confidence, the self-esteem, the skills - a love of learning and understanding, and education is a lifelong process” (GS4, 2012).

The reality of a changing workplace was contextualised in an understanding of the aims of education “A strong foundation will allow them to move into a whole range of different professions and ways of being in the world” (GS4, 2012). Similarly, there was a recognition of the need to prepare “young people who are able to deal with and work successfully in the twenty-first century...as we rapidly change, the pace of change is just exponential, and without the skills of discrimination and analysis and critical thinking...the higher order skills, kids are really up against it” (GS4, 2012).

The purpose of education was considered beyond the skills of literacy and numeracy to include a disposition of curiosity about learning and developing social and emotional skills. The perennial basics of reading, writing and arithmetic were acknowledged as enduring priority areas of skill[s] acquisition but respondents also identified the domains of social and emotional literacy “where kids feel that they are...involved with their own education” (GS1, 2011).

However, a contrasting view was also articulated. Some participants opined that social and emotional wellbeing needed to be addressed before the learner could focus sufficiently on other dimensions of learning. A collective sense that the education of the whole person, responding to all aspects of development of self was apparent. GS3 noted the importance of cultivating a “love of learning that goes with them throughout their whole life...it’s about the whole person and it’s about a whole school approach to that person” (GS3, 2011). The role of system and school in the development of young people was articulated:

I see it [education] as a very broad purpose and that encompasses everything from developing a sense of themselves, where they sit in the community, who they are, as well as developing skills and knowledge to help them participate in society later on. (GS2, 2011)

Within these discussions some participants considered how parents might view the purpose of education. Parents' views on the role of schools in different aspects of learning and

development was understood to vary from those who are actively involved and feel they share a responsibility for educating their children with the school, through to the parents who expect schools to cover education in all respects: “A lot of parents expect the school to do everything—sex education, alcohol, values that the parents in my generation... seem to have abrogated their parenting responsibilities” (GS6, 2012).

#### **5.2.4 A Convergence of Perspectives**

Interview data with stakeholders at the three distinct levels of educational engagement reveal convergent understandings of the broad aims of education and their relation to values education, specifically the *National Framework for Values Education* (DEST, 2003). What emerges is a congruence of thinking that connects the theory of educational purpose with the practices of learning about, understanding and demonstrating capability in values. Students commented about the necessity to learn the basics but understood education as being about the development of all dimensions of the person, not merely acquiring knowledge content. School leaders and teachers added to this understanding of the complex purpose of education and identified the imperative to develop lifelong learning capacities. Government and system representatives added an emphasis on active citizenship in a robust democracy bringing a sense of the international global landscape to the understanding.

### **5.3 Focus B: MIIC Outcomes**

The second interview focus addressed how the aims of education were reflected in the aims of the Values Education reform initiative and achieved through the work of the MIIC. The central aim of the MIIC was to provide opportunities for young people from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds to meet to discuss social issues related to identity, culture, race and ethnicity and their impact on social cohesion. Furthermore, there was a consideration of the alignment of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy with the broad aims of education and the specific aspirations of values education.

#### **5.3.1 Student Perspectives on the MIIC**

The students communicated a deep and developed sense of the aims of the MIIC. There was a clear identification of the aim to develop a greater understanding of *the other* in relation to cultural heritage and experience, faith affiliation and experience. Students acknowledged an aim of the MIIC as promoting social and intellectual interaction with the intention of confronting stereotypes and ignorance and building genuine relationships.

Students recognised the process of knowledge acquisition, tolerance, understanding, acceptance and recognition of preconceived ideas was a key stage in the development of character. The following comments illustrate how some students understood the aims of the MIIC: “It was about gaining a greater understanding of different faiths and cultures and sort of breaking down those stereotypes that we all have” (ST1, 2011), while ST4 asserted that the aims were “...to make us a bit more open-minded to be able to understand and accept other perspectives” (2012). ST2 saw that “It was really to break down stereotypes, and to bring people out of a – we are so sheltered in our own little schools” (2011); while ST6 summarised the aims of the MIIC as “Basically, just a better understanding and a greater tolerance of the different faiths...and just creating that awareness” (2012).

The aim to provide opportunities for young people from diverse cultural, faith, educational, socio-economic and geographical experiences to interact was well-understood and identified in student responses. There was an acknowledgement that this opportunity was unique as it allowed interactions that otherwise were unlikely: “An opportunity for us to be exposed and to integrate with people that we really wouldn’t usually integrate with, and to have fun, but also be able to talk and do normal things that led the way to us understanding” (ST5, 2012). The experience of growing up in homogenous religious cultural groups which can entrench stereotypes is expressed and identified as a cause of feeling different to others from unfamiliar cultural groups:

I know before I did it I had never met a Jewish person, and you hear a lot about Muslim people, but never meeting one, you just form stereotypes, and even other Christian schools or agnostic schools, you know, you don’t think that they could be very similar to you. (ST2, 2012)

There was a recognition that the MIIC activities exposed students to experiences of cultures other than their own and a realisation that their social reality was largely monocultural “And it’s not that we don’t want to step out of that, it’s just that it’s very difficult ‘cause you live your life in it not to be exposed to different types of, to different ways of life” (ST5, 2012). The aims of the MIIC project were considered broader than the aims of specific, independently-operating schools and that the discussion of issues relied on a greater diversity of participants to allow for “discussion about issues that were bigger than just [those] the schools themselves could handle” (ST3, 2011).

### **Relationship building opportunities**

Students commented that the MIIC was successful in achieving its aims to provide opportunities for interactions among young people from diverse backgrounds. ST3 said that “it was successful in the way that it brought people together, I think, and opened discussion” (2011), while another student experienced acceptance and understanding of others “acceptance of a person as a person” rather than judging others based on “what they’re wearing or the colour of their skin” (ST1, 2011).

Relationship-building was an outcome of the program for some student participants. Friendships were established and continuous, indicating a deeper than surface level of interaction among some participants: “I still keep in touch with quite a few people from the interfaith. I see them, actually, really often” said ST3, (2011), while another remarked that “we still keep in contact with each other so that’s one way of you knowing that it works...we’ve stepped past that prejudice of them being an unknown and now we’re just friends” (ST5, 2012).

A connection between the values program and preparation for post-school study and life was made in the following remark: “I think they were achieved because by the time I finished school, I had exposure to people from a variety of different backgrounds, and that provided me with, like, a very good foundation for dealing with university” (ST6, 2013).

### **Leadership development opportunities**

Students articulated the specific values they demonstrated during their involvement in the MIIC. The values of acceptance and understanding were evidenced in such responses as: “I’d like to think that I was accepting before, but it definitely opens up your horizons and makes you realise that everyone is—teenagers—are all pretty similar” (ST3, 2013); and “tolerance, definitely. Teamwork and co-operating with different people and communication skills, definitely” (ST4, 2012). Others commented that “well, we were breaking down those stereotypes” (ST6, 2013); and “I think it gave an opportunity to play out how you respect different people’s point of views, different people’s ideas, different people’s cultural traditions and stuff. Definitely understanding...I think understanding would be the biggest one” (ST5, 2013). Another student emphasised the “understanding and acceptance” (ST2, 2013).

An elaboration of acceptance was shown in one student comment on the strength and confidence required to fully participate, and an understanding that full participation allowed individuals to hold and articulate their beliefs:

Being able to stand up for myself and for what I believe in and in a way you had to accept what everyone else was saying, but at the same time you had to have the strength to be able to stand up and say “well, that’s what I believe, I believe this”. (ST2, 2013)

Students commented on opportunities to take on leadership within the group during the general gatherings of the Cluster as well as during larger open events organised to involve a wider group. The following comments illustrate autonomy over decision-making: “We had a bit more input into what was going on, and also, it allowed me to gain leadership skills and obviously communication skills and just allowed me to see how these things run” (ST4, 2012); and “there was one group meeting where I was the only student there, so I was encouraged to give my ideas a lot” (ST3, 2013).

Leadership implied a special responsibility and opportunity to participate in the decision-making about aspects of the project activities. The experience was regarded both as an opportunity and a responsibility.

Leadership was a huge part of it for me because you were in charge. I liked the way a lot of the time students were left in charge of the projects or running the day or we had a huge say in how we wanted it to turn out, but with that you had responsibility and you had to demonstrate that you could control this project. (ST4, 2012)

One student offered an observation that another student, whilst not initially an obvious leader, became a leader through participation in the MIIC project observing that “I’m not sure everyone would call x a leader, but they developed that as it went on” (ST2, 2013).

There is an expectation that student leaders present and share their experiences of leadership with other students, usually at school assemblies and student representative group gatherings. As only a limited number of students were able to participate in the interschool activities this aspect of student leadership allowed students to share their thinking and experience of the MIIC with the wider school community. In this context, one student recognised that their role involved learning something for themselves and sharing that learning with others:

To take out what we had learnt and to express it to other people ...not everyone has the same opportunities, and if there is something like this, we can teach someone something and it would have made a difference. (ST4, 2012)

### **5.3.2 Leadership Perspectives on the MIIC: Key Conditions for Reform**

Although the commentary from leaders and teachers in the MIIC reflected multiple interests and emphases, a range of recurrent themes relating to process and leadership imperatives emerged and are discussed in the following sections.

#### **Consistency of structure**

The *National Framework for Values Education* (DEST, 2003) gave impetus to schools to work in clusters and reflect on the areas within their own communities that needed attention. The Framework provided structure and support to develop new programs and enhance existing programs, “we could tie it in very easily with our religious program here... and it just supported it and complemented it so well” (LT7, 2012). The National Framework was credited with guiding the reform as it provided opportunities “to try some innovative approaches and some new ways of working with students and staff” (LT5, 2011).

It was acknowledged that values are reflected in all endeavours and every intention and activity of schools is values-laden, as expressed by LT5 in “values are absolutely fundamental, intrinsic, embedded in everything we do...constant reference is made to values” (2011). However, there was caution expressed that Values Education that seeks to prescribe one group’s set of values as superior to another is untenable asserted by LT3 when saying “if it’s done to impose one set of values on everybody, then I don’t see the point of that...it needs to respect and reflect the way everyone thinks” (2011).

#### **Alignment and commitment to educational reform**

Educational reform requires of leaders, strategic planning including the foresight to initiate an achievable vision to ensure that, “other people will want to belong to that vision and to implement that vision” (LT2, 2011). Further to envisioning reform, supportive groups of leaders need to resource the reform effort with time, funding and commitment to support the vision and operationalising of that vision: “some sense of the bridge to get there”, is encapsulated in this summarising commentary:

Anything that’s going to work or be effective needs time, sometimes money, and commitment. So it does require a group of people who have a vision, and it requires that vision to be at least shared by some of the leadership in order to be really effective ...the introduction always involves some awareness-raising, some visioning, some demonstration of what is involved. Any change means that there is a need to look at the

future and where it is hoped that this new change will take the organisation to, or culture to. (LT5, 2011)

There was also acknowledgement that there may be a significant disconnect between a belief in the value of a program and the application of that same program, “It’s a real challenge for leaders”, said LT2, “... they can say I really believe in values education and then do nothing more than that” (2011).

In relation to school culture, some schools identified areas where their work in values was well-established but requiring attention in certain areas. In all instances, schools were not involved at all or regularly in interfaith and intercultural activity. The formalised program of Values Education included a school audit of the current work and evidence of values learning and an identification of the areas of need (DEST, 2003). LT2 observed that “we reflect upon our practices, to ensure that we are being faithful to what we say” (2011).

The practical imperatives of introducing and consolidating reform initiatives were emphasised. Added to the investment of personnel, time, timetabling flexibility is professional learning, development and training so that a reform on this scale was likely to become embedded. The following statement elaborates on this: “any decent reform is done properly and to do it properly people need the time and the education and the training to do it properly. And, that costs money” (LT2, 2011).

### **Principal leadership and support**

Acknowledgement of the worth of the Values Education policy being developed and the relevance to school contexts was necessary for both Principal “buy-in” and sustained investment in the longevity of the project: “When the Principal signed on then ...you have people definitely attending things...the best way for reform to be introduced is top-down. (LT6, 2011). For educational reform to be sustainable it was necessary to embrace and embed the principles and practices of the framework at all levels of leadership and learning at schools, as articulated by LT5: “It has to be something that is embraced and embedded at all levels...it does require support from school leadership...and it requires resourcing” (2011).

A top-down approach to this educational reform was considered necessary, at least in the initial stages, as the reform would not have been initiated in the cluster schools without the authority of the Principal and subsequent provision of project resources. It was argued that for the educational policy to have traction, it needed to be led with conviction by principals and key administrators as articulated frequently: “The seed of the reform has to start somewhere

and I think that is an element of leadership” (LT2, 2011). Further statements demonstrate the role of leadership, particularly Principal leadership, in driving the reform: “This program had such momentum largely because the Principals signed on to it” (LT6, 2011); and, “I don’t think you can lift it as much if it was simply at say a teacher’s level” (LT7, 2012).

The reality of practical implications of teachers missing classroom teaching because of involvement in interschool projects requires funding to cover replacement teacher costs and in the case of the MIIC, this “was really useful and took away any objection to running anything” (LT6, 2011).

It was reported that educational reform requires substantiation in specific core school policy documents. There needs to be genuine resonance with the articulated mission and vision of the institution for the reform to have sustainability. As much as the actions need to correlate to the rhetoric of the school’s mission, the words are an important figurative touchstone for the values enacted. LT2 explained that “because it’s embedded in there [College Mission Statement and Strategic Plan], it gives Values Education longevity” (LT2, 2011).

School reform requires the sustained and practical support of teachers. Teachers take theory, policy, and curriculum frameworks into the classrooms and other learning settings, as noted in, “it needs to be inclusive as well as if it’s a school setting it needs to be the entire school community” (LT2, 2011); and it has to have “a workable, practical framework” (LT7, 2012). Unless teachers are able to see the vision of the Principal and senior leadership groups and conceive of their role in the realisation of the vision, the reform will not be adopted.

For sustainability of any reform within schools, it needs to be part of collective practice, otherwise there is a risk that the reform effort “dies when that individual moves on or goes, moves schools or moves to another job and you don’t have the time” (LT4, 2011). The MIIC Cluster Coordinator and School Coordinator roles were recognised as essential to the organisation and momentum of the specific programs. Having specific individuals charged with the responsibility as part of their role descriptions for organising structured meeting schedules, professional learning sessions and student meetings in and between schools were understood to be critical to the achievement of the project aims. Without the embedding of the language and practice of Values Education, the program was dependent upon individuals and would succeed or fail based on key personnel remaining in roles and at the schools. Momentum is maintained when professional practices are built into significant leadership roles as highlighted by LT4: “it’s seen as important now in the school because it is part of the senior leadership role”.



### **Sustainability of Values Education**

Central to any curriculum initiative are its links to the overall curriculum framework, assessment and reporting expectations and deliverables of the school. If a pilot program has added value to an existing curriculum program, then it is more likely to become embedded in the curriculum in the longer term. As LT8 remarks, “the fact that if it’s enriched your curriculum then it becomes part of your curriculum and so, the results of the program are maintained. The really important things become part of your curriculum” (2012).

Some schools were able to incorporate the program in their school handbooks, mission statements and other documents to support the inculcation of the program into the daily running of the school. Furthermore, because there was a synchronicity of the values project aims and activities with the beliefs and practices of the school, there was a natural sustaining of elements of the project. In one participating school the project aims became embedded in the College Mission Statement and Strategic Plan and this gave values education longevity. As explained: “it becomes part of our culture... This is what we hold true. This is what we implement and then it’s this which we reflect upon, our practices, to ensure that we are being faithful to what we say” (LT2, 2011).

It was acknowledged by teacher coordinators that to sustain a program of this type beyond the official government-funded phase, it is essential that schools, independently, take up the challenge to re-envisage the program in ways that do not depend on external funding so that the initiative be established and consolidated in schools’ projects. This was noted widely across the schools as: “The challenge is to keep it going in different ways that don’t cost money that become part of the school program” (LT4, 2011); “There’s a point beyond which you stop selling the vision and you just do it, and then the actual immersion in something, sells it to people who are not necessarily supportive or who are like-minded” (LT5, 2011); “To maintain the momentum you need continued interaction” (LT6, 2011); “We still maintain our connections with a lot of the other schools that we do a lot of the interfaith activities as well” (LT7, 2012); “As long as you have the right people and the right skills and the right sort of framework that can happen in every school” (LT8, 2012). Rather than cut the values education program at the school, or “diminish its importance” following the formal conclusion of the MIIC project, one school did the opposite and strengthened values education in their school community: “We will look at level coordinators and faculty coordinators and values education at the same time and so never in my time has there been a discussion along these lines where

should we cut that a bit or should we diminish its [values education] importance. Now, it's in fact the opposite" (LT8, 2012).

### **Learning experiences enabling student agency**

The students involved were given responsibility for the types of activities conducted throughout the process. Leadership skills were cultivated, and students felt they had some democratic agency. This sense of agency engaged them at a deeper level in the process and outcome of the project as explained "not just a lip service role, they need to be involved in a particular way because students are not stupid, they can sense hypocrisy" (LT6, 2011). Authentic student leadership roles were characterised by "real responsibility, real power to make decisions", contrasting with a reality that "very often when we elect student representatives, they don't do anything. They sit in committees and get a resume, a position and a badge. There was real power with no badge and kids signed up in droves, and the best Jewish Life Captains came out of those committees, because they got delegated real responsibility" (LT6, 2011).

The positive influence on student participants was noted and attributed to the opportunity for students to develop confidence and skills in communicating in and to small and large groups "To me, that's a wonderful skill to learn. And if that education allows those students to mature and learn those skills, so be it" (LT8, 2012). The growth of student participants is also shown in the following comment which powerfully elaborates the impact of participation in the MIIC activities on a young person's growth:

They were students who went on to be very successful, but I think that continued to instil into them a sense not only responsibility, but I think confidence. It's really unique that some of those kids actually are now very involved in community work and they're very involved in a lot of organisations that try to raise awareness on a lot of issues, but I think the Cluster worked for a lot of those kids, actually allowed them to find their voice, because initially kids like x and a few others, were actually very bright, very capable kids, great contributors, if you like, on many sort of levels but very shy at the same time, reluctant to perhaps take the leadership role. And, we've called them back a few times to have discussions with our senior school students and at school forums. It makes them proud that they're now, you know, a part of that. (LT7, 2012)

### **Inter-school collaboration**

The structure of the MIIC project group into a Cluster of five schools demanded another level of accountability beyond the immediate singular school context. The organisational structure of Clusters facilitated further self-reflection and evaluation on the part of individual schools within the Cluster. Additionally, the Cluster supported professional collaboration between teachers able to leverage the knowledge of peers from different school contexts providing “accountability criteria”. The collaboration provided an opportunity to work with others and evaluate the work against the national reform agenda criteria: “we can judge ourselves on that and others can judge us, too. That’s important” (LT2, 2011).

### **Learning about others and one’s own identity**

It was observed by teachers that students who participated in the program were challenged to reflect more deeply on their own faith and faith development. As they became more knowledgeable about their own faith and culture, they represented their identity for other students who were inquisitive to learn about one another’s religion. This process of reflection and discernment was, for many students, a confirmation of what was unique about their own faith identity and the values it promoted. There was some concern expressed that by encouraging and facilitating interfaith dialogue, the program might threaten the faith development of individual students, but this fear was allayed.

(One) girl who said this experience has made me think when I see the Islamic students praying regularly and when I see what their dress means to them and how they focus on their relationship with God, it’s made me think more about my own faith. (LT5, 2011)

### **Student participation**

The leaders acknowledged that the specific opportunities offered to the student participants at the numerous gatherings of the MIIC project resulted in a deeper understanding of others: “They come away with a much deeper understanding of where there are similarities and where there are differences but certainly not in a threatening way” (LT5, 2011). On a national level, the importance of such an endeavour is articulated strongly in the powerful statement by a teacher:

For the students who have been involved directly ... it’s been just an incredibly valuable experience for them—the staff also. I suppose just in terms of their breadth of understanding, the sorts of comments that they made also, talking about also again at

times possibly having been fearful of somebody, walking past someone who might have been wearing a hijab and now having new respect for them, that being a symbol of someone's relationship to God, and taking offence at people's racist jokes, you know, country relatives who might have made jokes that were seen to be funny, and now no longer finding them funny. The experience has been transformative in terms of the core values that have been held by students. (LT5, 2011)

The cross-sectoral nature of the Cluster's composition added a unique and powerful dimension to the interactions and discussions. The composition of diverse faith and cultural groups of adolescents was significant. For both the students directly involved and those students who observed the activities which took place at their schools, the project gave a profile to the value of open discussion, understanding different viewpoints and building relationships: "It's a part of the conversation, and that you engage, and you show respect for other ideas and other views and other perspectives" (LT5, 2011). For students in "a fairly monocultural school and a fairly monocultural suburb of Melbourne" the experience of interacting with a diverse range of other young people in their school environments, "opens the eyes of the other students" (LT4, 2011).

A teacher's reflection on their own experience of education and then an experience of teaching in a religious school, referred to the concept of cultural "bubbles" and the barriers to diversity that these monocultural experiences create:

I went to a public school and then a Catholic school even though I'm Jewish, so I went to the Catholic bubble, and then I went from the Catholic bubble, back into Australian society...and then into the Jewish bubble, and so it's nice for kids in the bubble to get out of the bubble and to not just meet kids from a Catholic bubble. (LT6, 2011)

In addition, it was noted that there are preconceived ideas that some people have before they interact with others and the following reflection identifies the benefit of having government school participation contributing to the diversity of the MIIC:

They brought Australian society into this very tight, cloistered world of private school children. I think it was great for them to see those kids and to debate those kids and also for those kids because I remember one of the boys said, wow, these kids are articulate, and I'm like well, yes, of course they are articulate because we're dealing with this stuff on a daily basis, and they did end up talking about politics even though we didn't make it an official part of the program. (LT6, 2011)

The program allowed teachers to reflect on the powerful impact of learning and the growth of ideas in young students. Teachers were able to observe learning outside the routine of the classroom, to be involved in education in a more philosophical way. In bringing disparate groups of adolescents together, teachers observed that the Socratic framework promoted open dialogue and relationship-building to advance understanding and provide a model of authentic community in our pluralist society. The deep learning and impactful experience is captured as powerful and memorable as elaborated in the following recollection,

I can reflect back to where people made reference to it being a magic moment as an educator. And I remember a particular staff member saying after a day when we had the five schools here at x, there are times when you, as a teacher, step back and say that was a magic moment in education, and that was one of those...just seeing the insightful and I suppose deep reflections that people shared on that day, that is, you could never have hoped for more, and in fact, you were quite breath-taken by what the students eventually reflected on at the end of the experience. (LT5, 2011)

The necessity of student enthusiasm for and participation in the reform is underscored. It was noted that students need to see the value in the reform agenda for the project to have credibility. Students were motivated to participate: “Volunteered rather than co-opted to be of the project... for the students it’s been very deep learning that’s taken place, and I think there were some relationships that were maintained between the students at different levels” (LT5, 2011);, and LT2 observed that it was “the students who have come along with it as well, not just the teachers” (2011).

### ***5.3.3 Government and System Perspectives on MIIC***

The responses of the Project Director, Project Manager, State Education Department and non-government Project Officers, Community Organisation Education Officer and Parent Advisory Body Representative informed the government and system perspective.

Values Education relates to the core purpose of education to develop the learning, and social capacity of the person to function within the cultural context of their society, as affirmed by GS2 in “Values Education...sits at the very centre of it [purpose of education]” (2011). This respondent also saw the values of respect, care and responsibility as “applying broadly to their personal individual activity behaviours but also in their social role” (GS2, 2011). As a consequence of the vital role schools play in supporting democracy in the community it follows that if issues related to community values are not dealt with at a school level, it is unclear where and to what extent they will be taught as articulated:

Schools play an essential role. I come to this question...from a couple of different perspectives as a former teacher but also as someone who's operated these Civics programs here at ESA for the Commonwealth as well as the Values Education project...if schools don't deal with this issue who does and who can. (GS2, 2011)

Values Education, by its nature, prompts thinking and conversations around the choices and impacts of educational endeavours, providing a forum to consider the rationale, the reasoning and the priorities of the educational endeavours, as explained by GS1 in "Effective Values Education provides a great opportunity to explore the rationale, the priorities, the important things that people want to see in the educational experience" (2011).

Values Education was complementary to the development of the life skills necessary to achieve harmonious relationships with others. The social dimension of learning provides training in respectful interaction with others which was identified as an important life skill, as claimed by GS5: "Education is not about just one set of knowledge that belongs to the disciplines of the humanities and sciences or whatever but it's about life skills. Education is about people learning to get along with one another" (GS5, 2012). There was a recognition that "Values Education is implicit" and that all educational endeavours are imbued with values regardless of a discrete program called Values Education. People have capacity to further develop,

An ability to understand, and discourse with relation to understanding and respecting someone else's point of view and understanding what it means to live in a society where you must be respectful if we are going to be achieving anything where we get along together as people, we have to have some kind of values education. (GS5, 2012)

Values education can provide an opportunity to teach socialisation skills explicitly in supporting a cohesive society with reference to damaging, disturbing ethnic conflict. Even though Australia is considered a socially cohesive country it was asserted that that was not a guaranteed state. In the learning experiences of the MIIC it was evident that young people became part of a diverse but socially cohesive community of learners as expressed:

Certainly, with the interfaith work that understanding, sharing of experiences and understanding of others led to cohesion, and although Australia is apparently a very socially cohesive country, that's easily fractured...if you look at Sydney with the riots. (GS6, 2012)

The key value of respect is a core disposition necessary for living harmoniously in a society. Education about values in relation to respecting others' perspectives and opinions is crucial to the cohesive workings of any community or society in local, national and global contexts. As GS4 claims, "The reason for enacting the values becomes attached to our common good and our ability to operate successfully with one another. I think that's where intercultural understanding elements have really risen to the fore" (2012). GS4 goes on to say:

I think the key value to create citizens that can operate successfully together, is respect, because again, when you unpack respect it gets attached to all sorts of behaviours that allow you to be more tolerant and more understanding of those around you. (GS4, 2012)

National and State educational policy settings and consequently the curriculum frameworks have reflected a more expansive sense of citizenship particularly in relation to global citizenship. This development of policy and curriculum design connected with the focus of the work of MIIC and is articulated in the elaboration below:

We've actually shifted a little bit more into the intercultural understanding area and our strategy at the moment is education for global and multicultural citizenship, and central to that is notions of intercultural literacy, and the view of that is we need to see ourselves as global citizens, and if you're going to see yourself that way you have to prepare for that, so you need to understand more about the world and who lives in it and some of the traditions and some of the beliefs and some of the similarities and differences between cultures. (GS1, 2011)

Values Education is implicit in all fields of studies and contexts of learning. Values Education was understood to be all-encompassing and includes any study of respect for: self, others, the law, justice and the environment. The values that were deemed worthy of educational attention related to "civil society and ...the elements of civil society, so it's about respect for the law, respect for justice...respect for nature ...human rights...the environment" (GS5, 2012).

A scaffolded approach to Values Education was advocated whereby students were encouraged to demonstrate their understanding of good citizenship in the school community and then replicate that degree of participation in the local community and beyond. The importance of contextualising citizenship from a local position was asserted beginning at the school level. A scaffolded approach was recommended to support young people to establish a

sense of what it means “to be a citizen within your school, as much as it is to be a citizen within your local community, your state and your nation and the world. You can’t do one without those others” (GS5, 2012).

Schools were perceived as environments for developing and, more crucially, demonstrating active citizenship for later life. While it was acknowledged that schools need to ensure learners develop the requisite literacy and numeracy skills they need, social literacy and emotional literacy was a priority. Schools have a critical role as expressed:

Schools are those places where you can rehearse active citizenship ... They [students] will be in positions to understand others’ perspectives to be able to solve problems, make decisions. So schools actually set the foundation. (GS1, 2011)

Beyond the expressed inherent merit of Values Education the participants at the macro-level of engagement identified issues for consideration when establishing such reform. These themes summarised below present both challenges and opportunities for implementation.

### **Principal leadership**

The success of the initiative was argued to lie with the support of the Principal in the first instance. The teacher then becomes critical to the implementation of the educational reform. The following comments indicate this: “The Principal of the school has got to be on board with whatever the reform is” (GS5, 2012); “The Principal needs to know about it (the reform) and needs to commit to have and really support whatever the initiative is” (GS3, 2011); and “If it’s a system-wide change that change has to be very carefully introduced by the Principal, but then it has to be understood well – how can this fit to this school which might be different from the next school” (GS5, 2012).

A short, medium and long-term change management framework strategy must be designed and implemented in accordance with the culture of the educational organisation. GS5’s remark, “If it’s (reform) been brought about by enforcement rather than collaboration, you can’t then expect that that will happen within the classroom” (2012), demonstrates this.

### **Politicisation of Values Education**

The method by which the reform has been introduced has a significant bearing on the efficacy and the endurance of the reform. The initiative suffered in its early phase from a perceived politicisation of the issue of values in schools. The motif of ‘Simpson and his Donkey’ represented certain values and alienated some groups who felt that one moment in Australian history was prioritised over other significant moments reflecting key values for



Australian schooling. Respondents' observations reflect this as "The whole debate around the iconography around the framework, used Simpson and his Donkey as a very classic case of how delicate this political balance was" (GS2, 2012); and "a lot of people took a bit of umbrage to that because they felt that was coming at it from a particular perspective looking to set a particular point of view within schools" (GS5, 2012).

The perception among some that the issue of values was too politicised was a distraction but then "once people could see well, here was an opportunity, here was a way that we can work together, build a bit of unity around some key priority areas, which I think Values Ed., tends to do almost – it's almost intuitive" (GS1, 2012). The reality of collaboration about values in "safe, purposeful environments ...about engaging students" alleviated initial misgivings some had who became "wholeheartedly supportive" (GS1, 2012).

Educational reform would have been impossible without the support of both Federal and State government levels and support from the non-government sector. The Values project was initiated at a Federal government level with endorsement from Ministers with the provision of funding to support a "ground-up approach" from schools (GS2, 2012).

In the initial stages of educational reform, the investment in resources allocated by the Federal government encourages buy-in early. Following from this, further provision of support from the State governments and non-government sectors is necessary. Without this complete system and sector engagement "It's impossible to have a reform in Australian education" (GS2, 2012). In relation to the Values reform initiative, there was clear evidence of comprehensive endorsement and resource allocation "to develop PD across regions in every state and territory", as a result of "an enormous consultative process" (GS2, 2012).

Having and maintaining bipartisan support for reform initiatives maximises the sustainability of the effort. It was noted that consecutive governments "maintained their engagement" with the values reform and, "didn't just drop it because it was something that came out of a previous regime...actually added to it" (GS2, 2012). It was also noted that in relation to the Civics project, another education reform initiative, it was a Labor government initiative that was endorsed further when the Liberal coalition was in government. Having widespread support including "bipartisan approaches" contributes to the sustainability of reform (GS2, 2012).

### **Integration with State and National curriculum**

Educational reform is not valued if it is short-term and aligning with a political agenda and cycle. In such instances there is only time to initiate and implement in a temporary manner but not sufficient time to comprehensively evaluate and report on programs, as noted by GS4: “it wasn’t part of our brief to do a future evaluation or to see exactly how teachers used it, so we don’t know how many people have been using it and how well” (2012).

The timing of the introduction of the Values Education was problematic. The introduction of the *National Framework for Values Education* (DEST, 2003) in Australia coincided with the introduction of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS, VCAA, 2005) and although Values Education was implicit in the VELS, it was first and foremost a subject curriculum document which prioritised an examination of curriculum design, delivery, assessment and reporting, as noted by GS1: “It (Values Education reform) took the better part of three or four years before it had widespread acceptance ...so we had to make the connection between values and VELS” (2012).

The reform was offered as a framework, not a detailed prescriptive curriculum course of study. The program was not mandated and because of the freedom given to schools to use the framework for the context agreed upon by the collective cluster of schools, it was embraced, and positive results could be observed and reported, as demonstrated in the following remarks: “Embedding reform into curriculum documents ensures sustainability. The Civics and Citizenship program of reform was a case in point” (GS2, 2012); “From the beginning of that project, Civics just didn’t rate a mention in any of the State and Territory curriculum documents. By the end of it, it was well and truly embedded” (GS2, 2012); “The professional learning of teachers is an effective way of embedding practice and sustaining reform” (GS3, 2011).

The second phase of the Values Education reform including Good Practice Schools projects were deemed the most successful because the funding, resources and support went directly to the schools. There was autonomy for schools to design their own projects, but support structures were in place for projects to be “reviewed and monitored and we (system) could learn from schools about what works and what doesn’t work” (GS2, 2012).

A hallmark of the Good Practices School projects was that it was not mandated or prescriptive: “It was recognising the eclectic nature of Australian education” (GS2, 2012). Schools voluntarily worked with other schools in clusters and planned their learning activities related to an aspect of the framework of values for Australian schooling.

Some schools have continued the work of the Values Education project whereas other schools have linked with other educational endeavours related to social and emotional learning including the Safe Schools project (DET, 2010) and Restorative Justice (Short *et al*, 2018; Shaw, 2007). The reality of a crowded curriculum and pressures on schools to implement multiple social programs was argued to impact on the application of educational reforms such as Values Education: “if you’re trying to introduce a new reform in the current environment, you’re going to have trouble finding space” (GS1, 2012). One solution was to “piggyback” the reform on similar connected programs that are already being implemented in schools. For the Values project, it was important “to make the connection between values and VELS (Victorian Essential Learning Standards)” (2012).

Embedding reform in curriculum documents was understood to maximise the potential for sustainability. This was the case with the Civics and Citizenship reform project as described by GS2 who also recognised connections between the Values project and the “Melbourne Declaration ...the general capabilities of the National Curriculum and ...the History curriculum” (2012).

### **School involvement and commitment to reform**

Building context and a clear methodology for the project was a key to encouraging schools to buy-in to the project. Schools responded to the invitation to engage and involve other schools in the partnership Cluster approach. It was evident that the system stakeholders demonstrated a strategic intention to build engagement across State and Territory education jurisdictions and school sectors. Collaborative partnerships operating at a local level were at the core of the reform strategy.

The other part of the puzzle was getting the schools engaged. Initially the methodology was flawed in the Values Ed., project. There was a belief that somehow you could throw a bit of money at schools and every one of them would put their hands up and get the money to do a forum...so we had to, at state levels, build context around values in a way that would—people could see the links between local priorities, local curriculum, and see the benefit in working together. (GS1, 2012)

Having evidence of good practice was understood to be a way of promoting involvement among more reluctant schools. In a curriculum often characterised as “crowded”, it is challenging to engage schools in curriculum programs which are not formally part of a curriculum framework, and consequently not mandated, assessed or reported against benchmarks or achievement standards. However, it was considered beneficial to have “real

evidence that we could then take back to the schools and say well, this is what has come out of schools engaged in this work and this is how it looks in relation to the work that you're doing" (GS1, 2012). The funding provided through the project allowed time to develop the ideas of Values Education into practice. This provided capacity for the MIIC to "buy the time to make that happen ...apply an ideal that they had about what they felt was important and therefore do it" (GS5, 2012).

The cluster model of collaboration allowed for a diverse range of groupings and learning experiences. For some groups the cluster structure allowed for dynamic professional learning communities to evolve. GS2 explains this as "critical mass ...more capacity" for "teacher learning which is not as strong in a single school approach" (GS2, 2012). For the MIIC, the cluster model of collaboration allowed the group to "bring in very different faiths into the picture, as well as secular education" (2012). There was a recognition that not all clusters collaborated well together for a myriad of reasons: "Some of them geographic, some of them personality, that's par for the course...but if you said to me let's re-run this again and this is your choice to go single schools or cluster I'd choose clusters any time" (GS2, 2012).

#### **5.3.4 Alignment of Perspectives**

It is apparent that across the three levels of inquiry, there is evidence of an alignment of perspectives in relation to the aims and outcomes of the experience of the MIIC. Each of the respondent groups identified the importance of the MIIC project within the Values Education reform initiative. Additionally, this analysis demonstrates that from a learner perspective, students understood the aims to have been achieved, allowing for personal and social development. From a school leadership and classroom teacher perspective, the characteristics of pedagogy which align with educational goals was impactful on student learning. Finally, from a system perspective, the MIIC represented an authorising environment that supported school leaders and teachers to enact education reform.

#### **5.4 Focus C: The Efficacy of Socratic Circles**

The final interview questions and focus group session focused on the application of Socratic Circles Pedagogy. The aim of the research was to explore questions integral to Values Education and the pedagogical practices reflected in the (MIIC) project. Data from structured interviews was explored progressively through Constant Comparative Analysis of themes within each of the levels of inquiry. This section of the chapter presents the results of the second phase of data collection and develops the emerging thematic understandings at a wider and

deeper contextual and personal level of analysis. The perspectives presented here are those of the school leaders, coordinators and teachers involved in the MIIC project.

#### ***5.4.1 Leadership Insight Associated with Socratic Circles Pedagogy***

The leaders identified a number of key aspects of Socratic Circles worth noting. They discussed the utility and transferability of Socratic Circles allowing them to adapt the pedagogy in their teaching of other learning areas. The use of Socratic Circles promoted critical thinking and led to deeper learning. Integration of values education across subjects and in co-curricular programs consolidated the work begun in the MIIC in specific school contexts. The organisation of Socratic Circles requires a physical change in the learning environment with participants facing one another increasing levels of purposeful interaction and promoting pro-social capacity. Levels of engagement in learning increase as there is a demand of focus and greater expectation of participation during Socratic Circles.

##### **An avenue to educational reform**

The experience of using the Socratic Circles pedagogy revealed its utility and transferability across curriculum areas and across year levels. The transferability of Socratic Circles was observed as school Values Education coordinators adapted the professional learning as part of the interschool cluster to their respective schools. Teachers were able to use the discussion techniques across various subjects and it was observed that the quality of discussion and involvement lifted significantly. Additionally, the structure of Socratic Circles engaged both teachers and students in the learning process in an innovative way in some school contexts where the pedagogy promoted higher order thinking in numerous learning areas and “lifted the level of discussion significantly” (LT4, 2011). Teachers were able to apply their learning in the MIIC and introduce Socratic Circles to focus on interfaith, intercultural issues and perspectives in their own contexts in engaging ways “to promote higher order thinking, to promote the sharing of ideas, modelling of ways of communicating in a respectful way” with “broad cross-curricular potential and application” (LT5, 2011).

Evidence of the utility and transferability of Socratic Circles was its application across year and learning levels as well as learning areas. The variety of possible stimulus material in relation to text types including “an image or text or a conversation, a film ... has great application in all sorts of forums and in all sorts of contexts” (LT5, 2011). The range of source materials which were used as prompts for the Socratic Circles contributed to the broad application of the pedagogical approach as explored in more detail: “we have seen it works across the six-year

levels as well, so I think that has enhanced the teaching and learning, too. I think that's important" (LT2, 2011).

The professional learning and development for the teachers involved had a flow-on effect in the participating schools with the use of the discussion strategy by teachers who were not directly involved in the project itself. The coordinating teachers at the Cluster schools shared their experience of using Socratic Circles and scaffolded the introduction of the pedagogy at their respective schools. How the approach was utilised in one school is explained by LT7 who continues to be approached by colleagues particularly new teachers who want to learn how to use the pedagogical strategy in their teaching:

I was telling x the other day how to bring it in, and he's a maths teacher ...the majority of the religious education department (are) using it as a tool to teach religion, but most importantly when they're doing comparative religion so it's definitely set them a benchmark and given them a tool to utilise in that sense, so it's good to see that, even though it's been years since we did that. (LT7, 2012)

The explicit teaching of values across curriculum areas was both possible and a preferable way of implementing the reform. In curriculum areas such as English and the Humanities, there are numerous examples of opportunities to integrate or reference values, for example, "being a teacher of Ethics at my school, I was able to put it straight into every single class that I've been in... I put it into every religious class I teach in which we look at values, we look at any topic, current affairs" (LT6, 2011). For teacher coordinators and classroom teachers, involvement in the MIIC project provided practical professional learning, "I've been trained in how to run them. It has been really PD for me" (LT6, 2011).

It was reported that the Cluster project provided a springboard for other related, though less formal, programs of values education, further validating the participation in the initial project. One example of its application in a school context was the incorporation of it in the homeroom and assembly pastoral program which lacked structure and purpose, a "dead zone". By focussing on contemporary issues, as had been the focus of the Socratic Circles in the MIIC, the school was able to design a program around a series of Socratic Circles for "relationships and team issues" (LT6, 2011). Teachers involved in the MIIC Socratic Circles were able to observe numerous Socratic Circles and reported developing confidence in the practice of the pedagogy. The benefit of professional collaboration with other teachers in the MIIC provided a valuable opportunity "to see how other schools operate it to take ideas from them; to have the

opportunity to improve your skills by developing another program in the school and seeing it work” (LT4, 2011).

Quality and comprehensive professional learning and development sessions were required to ensure continuity of the teaching about and conducting of Socratic Circles during the project and allowed individual schools to embed the pedagogical practice. The Cluster model of collaboration between teaching professionals provided opportunities for sharing ideas and developing pedagogical practice. High quality teaching and learning professional development informed individual practice and was sustainable beyond the funding phase of the program. The process in one school was described as “top-down” where the principal chose staff and agreed to their attendance at training in the use of Socratic Circles. Following from the initial professional development, teachers implement the teaching practice and that is shared with other staff and “that way you can get it throughout the school” (2011).

Schools that could connect the experience of the project with their school’s tradition and culture were able to appreciate another dimension of relevance. In one school context, the specific religious charism of the school was appreciated as deeply connected to the dialogic approach to values education in the MIIC project as illustrated in the detailed reflection:

The fact is that Dominicans dialogued with Islam way back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, so that whole issue of respect, tolerance, understanding, seeking knowledge, by engaging with others...And I think something else that was fundamental to Dominican tradition is an approach of democratic acceptance of alternative views and there are stories of Dominic, as the founder of the order, dialoguing and I suppose engaging with people who at the time were seen to be following heretical views, but convincing through dialogue and through conversation...in reaching some sort of sense of where the truth lies, and that goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. (LT5, 2011)

#### **A strategy to learn about values**

The progression from learning about values to demonstrating those values was seen to be of significance. Socratic Circles provided a complementary pedagogical approach to the teaching of values by the interactional nature of the method because, as noted by one respondent, “to use something like Socratic Circles where people are not necessarily being taught the values...they learn the values through interaction” (LT1, 2011).

### **Demanding of focus and participation**

The Socratic Circles structure was challenging for students. As a discussion methodology, all students involved are expected to participate in both the discussion as a member of the inner circle and in feedback as part of the outer circle. The structure demands that students focus on the discussion in a more attentive way than that associated with traditional classroom discussions. Various responses show this, as in “It also challenges every student. It also provides a way of making students focus on the discussion, particularly when...they’re in the outer circle and the inner circle (LT4, 2011); “It certainly makes you reflect more on exactly what you’re going to say” (LT5, 2011); and “Pre-warning is good for some topics. Not a lot of topics are easy to grasp straight away by students. They like to be slowly led into it” (LT6, 2011).

### **A physical space for learning**

The physical organisation of the learning space facilitated genuine social interaction as students were seated in a circle facing one another, being accountable to one another in the exchange and contest of ideas. In contrast, familiar traditional classroom set-ups follow a lineal rectangular row organisational pattern. Students may learn in a room with other students, but the learning process is individualised. The educational benefit of re-organising the physical space of the classroom to include opportunities for authentic and structured group work was reported by LT1, in “we have actually changed the way of sitting which doesn’t enhance much learning; so we tried to either have group sessions or the tables are arranged in a circle form” (2011).

### **The promotion of social capacity through interaction and dialogue**

The development of pro-social capacity through participation in Socratic Circles was observed through the activities of the MIIC. In a social network-saturated culture, adolescents communicate using distinctly different modes than those used by previous generations. Adolescents have access to mobile phones and screens now in contrast to previous generations and use of technology is integrated into learning experiences. The formal discussion method of the Socratic Circles provides a unique experience to practise skills in oral communication necessary for community engagement or workplace interaction as: “it gives them an opportunity to listen to others, what they say, and have an opportunity to respond later in a very organised discourse” (LT1, 2011).



The importance of deliberate and active listening was emphasised as a worthy social skill to develop in adolescents. Participants in the Socratic Circles had an opportunity to listen and then speak. Different viewpoints were expressed in a respectful environment created by both the teachers and the students involved, as revealed in the range of interview responses, including LT5's comment that "it's a part of conversation, and that you engage, and you show respect for other ideas and other views and other perspectives. In reaching some sort of sense of where the truth lies" (2011), or LT3's acknowledgement:

What I like about Socratic Circles is that people speak and those that aren't speaking are forced to listen, and that's what I think Socratic Circles is valuable in doing... it forces you to listen. And then, it gives you the opportunity to provide your input. (2011)

The development of personal and social awareness and management enabled students to re-assess their own identities and grow in appreciation of other individuals and groups. In recalling one particular Socratic Circles dialogue about the issue of national and global identity, a teacher reflected that students are inclined "to look at Australians, Aussies, and themselves as Lebanese or whatever and refer to 'my' country meaning Lebanon or Somalia or whatever" (LT1, 2011).

The deeper, more meaningful interactions observed through the activities of the MIIC were attributed to the regularity of gatherings with the core group of students. The more complex and formal discussions which took place during the Socratic Circles contrasted with previous individual school interfaith activities such as learning about world religions during Religious Education class, visits to mosques or synagogues, and guest speakers' presentations of information about different faiths. As LT4 notes, "so even though we visited mosques and we visited Jewish synagogues and temples...having the students mixing with the students from the schools, gave it an extra dimension. It wasn't just, 'isn't this a nice building'" (2011). Furthermore, the inclusion of dialogue about issues relevant to young people in a pluralist society, allowed students to see and understand similarities in viewpoints rather than simply see differences in religious traditions.

The establishment of genuine friendships was sustained by the regularity of project activities, as revealed: "even when we met this year at x College, I could see they still identified with each other, hugging...it wasn't done as a one-off discussion" (LT1, 2011). The reality of the continuous program of interschool activities helped students to form bonds and relate easily with one another.

The composition of the MIIC was diverse, with representatives from five very different school communities in terms of cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, the participants were from different geographical areas of Melbourne; including both co-educational and single gender school representation. This diversity was identified as a positive experience: “making connections with a variety of schools from very different areas, was also very important” as a teacher recalls one of their students remarking, “well, we knew these schools were over there, but, you know, I’d never met anyone from x or someone from x”, and they established significant continuing friendships (LT4, 2011).

The element of fun and friendship-building was observed as having occurred through the activities of the MIIC. The social aspect of the regular gatherings of the five different Cluster schools motivated students’ participation and was regarded as a key to the learning about and demonstration of core values in this adolescent context. Some friendships endured after the project and after school where former participants connected at university and continued friendships. As expressed: “the program just congealed a lot of things, all of the bits and pieces of their identity...they went from interfaith into their lives...instead of embracing it from a lip-service point of view, which can often happen” (LT6, 2011).

The formal program organised around clusters of schools, the *National Framework for Values Education* (DEST, 2003) including the nominated values given prominence, provided an opportunity for schools themselves to re-visit and re-examine the authenticity of the existing school practice as it related to values education. One Lead teacher said that “it’s kept us honest and constantly challenged us as well. To be honest to the reforms and to the values” (LT2, 2011), while LT7 described a reaction thus:

I love the fact that there were no barriers and I could see these kids interacting just as easily and as commonly and on a common ground as they were with their peers at this school...all of the labels disappeared and that was great. (2012)

While acknowledging that student participants were initially inhibited, especially in the first couple of gatherings many “continued to communicate with each other outside of school” (LT7, 2011).

### **Pedagogy of Socratic Circles: Supporting an understanding of others**

The objective of the Socratic Circles in the Values Education program was to understand other people’s points of view and the context and background to the formulation of those ideas. This was evident in the observations of school leaders and teachers who noted that “the students

were able to present different viewpoints and were able to listen to each other and understand what each other was saying ...it's all about understanding other people's points of view" (LT3, 2011).

Participation in the MIIC program helped to dismantle some cultural stereotypes as students were interacting and engaging in dialogue with other young people from different schools. This more meaningful engagement allowed students to see others "on a one-on-one basis at their level, away from all of those other issues that might sort of cloud them" allowing them to "interact and understand and their language is universal regardless of everything else that is happening around them in the world" (LT7, 2012).

The feedback element of the Socratic Circles was found to be effective when the participants were receptive to improving their communication skills and/or knowledge of the issue at hand. One viewpoint asserted that the discussion process only works for those people who are open-minded to the process. One respondent described the process as dependent upon participants being receptive to feedback: "If you're open-minded then it works perfectly well, but I can see Socratic Circles not working for those who are deliberately close-minded and refuse to listen to what other people have to say" (LT3, 2011).

Socratic Circles discussion was directed by students who were responsible for the preparation of notes and questions. Students needed to drive the conversation and could not rely on the teacher to provide prompts and generate discussion topics. As LT5 notes, "young people now don't accept things without the opportunity to engage and to examine and to criticise and come to a deeper understanding of things" (2011).

### **Pedagogy of Socratic Circles: Democratically inclusive way of teaching values**

Socratic Circles discussion allowed for a close reading and articulation of issues around personal and national identity, displacement and belonging, active and passive citizenship, social conflict and cohesion. The discussion was described as "a very democratic way of teaching for values education and since we are a democracy it's a good way to teach" (LT6, 2011). As a forum for dialogue in the MIIC, Socratic Circles promoted leadership within the circle and prompted participation via the contribution of interesting reflections and insights related to stimulus material: "It's very easy for the kids to identify a leader in the discussion, an interesting speaker, an interesting point" (LT6, 2011).

#### **5.4.2 *Student Perspectives on Pedagogy: Deep Pedagogical Analysis***

This section of the chapter presents the results of focus group interviews into the experience of pedagogy by the learners, specifically in response to the focus group discussions on the impact of the Socratic Circles conversation structure as part of the MIIC. The reflections of students provide particularly rich insight into the structural, relational and intellectual features of Socratic Circles Pedagogy and the use of this strategy in the practices of Values Education. The focus group student responses revealed nine key thematic insights that support the application of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy in achieving the outcomes focus of Values Education. These thematic insights will be discussed in turn.

##### **Physical organisation of learning space**

The actual physical organisation of the discussion into a circle was complementary to the process designed to provoke thought and elicit contributions to the circle discussion. One student described the circle structure as crucial to orientating participants to the task and encouraging equitable participation: “you can’t have a Socratic Circles discussion if you’re sitting in a line or if you’re sitting at a table. It doesn’t really work. You have to be facing each other” (ST5, 2013). The organisation of learners in circular formation facing one another is a departure from many mainstream classroom layouts. It was observed that “you can’t have someone hiding in the corner, because obviously in the circle there’s no corners. Someone can’t just shy away from it: they’ve got someone staring at them and they’re compelled to contribute in some way” (ST5, 2013). This observation provides insight into the high expectations of student learning and engagement in this pedagogy. Equitable participation in class discussions can be challenging to achieve. The physical organisation of the Socratic Circles promotes engagement and accountability.

The structural feature of the outer circle of the Socratic Circles also benefitted participants and promoted involvement and equitable participation giving participants time to absorb the different viewpoints and make note of insights to respond to and elaborate, expressed as follows:

Everyone had something to say, and like just sitting back and absorbing the information that the first circle was going through and just sitting there absorbing and just take mental notes. (ST6, 2013)

The structure provided a framework for groups who found it challenging to initiate dialogue, “a framework was very important for groups who didn’t know how to begin” (ST2,

2013). The pre-reading part of the process provided a provocation for the conversation and the structure a guide as articulated:

I think having something there that you could already have an opinion about, or you got to read about something and if you disagreed with that, great, you can talk about that. (ST2, 2013)

The Socratic Circles structure provides a framework for dialogue, a process for students to work through the close reading of various relevant texts to prompt their thinking, and then further structural elements which guide the discussion in two parts incorporating the inner discussion circle and the outer feedback circle. The benefit of this framework was highlighted in the following student response: “I know for me having structure is very good because it gives me a guideline to follow” (ST6, 2013).

### **Natural and grounded form of discussion**

Socratic Circles were identified as a more realistic style of discussion than traditional classroom discussion discourse where teachers choose the content and direct the course of the conversation. One respondent contrasted the two approaches to discussion noting the effectiveness of Socratic Circles which “allowed us to communicate effectively...because in school you always raise your hands and the teacher tells you to talk about it, but in real life it’s not like that” (ST4, 2013). Instead the Socratic Circles process engendered listening skills and turn-taking in a conversational way.

### **Engendering self-regulatory behaviour**

Students mentioned the regulatory influences upon their behaviour in the Socratic Circles structure attributed to the fact that the students involved were mature for their age and in an interschool context which prompted politeness and consideration of others: “we kind of all fostered each other and tried to encourage each other rather than put someone else’s opinion down” (ST3, 2013). Students developed self-regulation, waiting for others to participate rather than dominating the conversation: “Even though you are sitting there and you’re absolutely desperate, you’ve got an opinion and you want to go and share it, but you have to sit back and consider other people’s opinions” (ST1, 2013).

### **Structuring of feedback**

Former student participants reflected upon the role of the outer circle as being a distinctive feature of the Socratic Circles structure. It was an extra dimension to the discussion

which highlights active listening skills and encouraged participants to have a heightened sense of their own contribution. The following insights are illustrative of this:

I guess it was about...the way I remember it is about an increased listening almost, because that outer circle's sole role is to just sit and listen (ST1, 2013);

and,

Values played a big part in a successful Socratic Circles because you had to listen then you had to try and understand, then had to respond and you had to be respectful, all in the different ways of doing that. (ST5, 2013)

The role of the outer circle, or feedback group, is a distinguishing feature of the Socratic Circles discussion structure. Half of the student participants sit in the outer concentric circle to listen and observe. They follow guided questions and write responses as the inner circle discuss the issue at hand. At the end of the inner circle discussion, the outer circle is given the opportunity to provide positive feedback to specific individuals or the group and also to provide general comments in relation to areas for improvement. The following comments by former student participants are illustrative of their perceptions of the purpose and effectiveness of the outer circle and the perceived quality of the feedback: "you're considering the information and then pointing out the important part so you're not time-wasting, particularly. Yeah, so you've got that structure" (ST6, 2013). Students understood the role of the outer circle to include the provision of both positive and constructive feedback providing examples of the kinds of areas for improvement which may be addressed: "if they weren't listening to each other they would say that or if that was negative talking—and there usually wasn't—they would also provide feedback on that" (ST4, 2013).

Students engaged in self-reflection about their communication habits when in conversation with others, "trying to think of the next thing that you can say" (ST5, 2013). It was evident that the outer circle feedback group dynamics encouraged them to become better communicators. It was noted that when a participant is in the feedback group they need to listen, absorb what is being said, write comments and further questions and wait for their opportunity to provide feedback and their turn in the inner discussion circle. This process was experienced as "a good learning lesson to be respectful and tolerant, because you're not allowed to just jump in" (ST5, 2013).

The inclusion of the outer circle adds an element of performance to the process. The inner concentric circle is in dialogue being observed by the outer circle for the purpose of

constructive feedback. As a consequence, there was evidence of a heightened sense of awareness of one's own participation and perceptions of one's participation by peers as detailed in the reflection provided below:

Personally I'm fairly good at going off on a 10-minute monologue and just kind of, you know, speaking, this is my opinion, putting it all out there, but if you've got 10 people watching you, you kind of go maybe I should let somebody else have a go and if they say what I believe, too, then I'll agree with them. Rather than just dominate the discussion, you feel moderated or I felt moderated ... because other people are sort of observing you, you're observing yourself. (ST1, 2013)

This notion of "observing yourself" as others are observing you, provides insight into the self-regulatory aspect of the Socratic Circles. Students appreciated the honest "constructive" feedback from peers about specific details of the discussion noting that "usually your peers are quite honest; it's like there're not tainted by it, like 'I have to be nice to you', I'm going to be nice to you, but I'm still going to say, 'Yeah, I didn't like that.'" (ST5, 2013). The Socratic Circles process enables each participant to take turns in the inner and outer circles during the course of each dialogue session "everyone gets the opportunity to be that feedback person" and this means that "no one's really singled out. ...sometimes when you get feedback from a different type of discussion, it's one-sided, very one-sided and it's hard to take that constructively because you're like, 'Well, you're not giving me the opportunity to say, 'Well, this is what I think you could have done better'" (ST5, 2013). This insight reflects the characteristic of reciprocity evident in the concentric circles of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy.

Encouragement to delve deeper into issues and discussions was a feature of the outer circle as identified by two students in their responses: "I think they were just telling people when they didn't speak enough or to, you know, be more opinionated or to go further in their discussions" (ST3, 2013); and "...attempt to bring a deeper level of thought into the discussion" (ST1, 2013).

### **Teacher-student relationship**

Further contrasts were identified between the Socratic Circles structured discussion and traditional classroom discussion. In Socratic Circles "there's a lot more freedom. Within other discussion types they're labelled a discussion. But they're not really, it's not really discussing ...you're not facing each other" (ST5, 2013). Traditional classroom discussion as characterised by students involves students facing the teacher and most students facing the backs of other students. Traditional discussion can result in some students hiding "in the corner; people won't

contribute; and then you're so intimidated by the fact that you can't say some things because you think you might get in trouble" (ST5, 2013). Limits on what can be said in traditional classroom environments, whether these limits are perceived or actual, are a barrier to free-flowing and authentic dialogue.

Classroom discourse that resembles more traditional classroom environments are teacher-centred where students are more passive participants. The teacher controls the manner, content, purpose and direction of the discourse. The discourse bears little resemblance to a real-life conversation which evolves naturally and is directed by the participants. This is noted by ST5:

At school and particularly with the teacher standing out the front it's quite intimidating and it's more like a, sometimes it's a brainstorming ending and someone will say one word and no one else will comment on it and there's no interweaving links. There's no conversation and I find that's not, that's definitely not the type of discussion that the Socratic Method brought out (2013).

The "interweaving links" identified as characteristic of Socratic Circles dialogue reflect the more natural organic nature of the discussion framework wherein "students are much more willing to listen, because as soon as somebody above you is sort of talking down ...students have a tendency to just kind of shut off" (ST1, 2013).

### **Critical reading as integral to pedagogical process**

Students spoke about the purpose and effectiveness of the Critical Reading stage. Several students referred to the stimulus material which provoked thought and was selected to encourage discussion. The material was selected by both teachers and students and provided to students at least a week prior to the Socratic Circles discussion. Students were asked to read the prompts for discussion critically and annotate the text/s with comments and further questions in preparation for their contributions to the forthcoming discussion. Students expressed their perceptions of the usefulness of this stage in the Socratic Circles process in the following comments: "It's interesting that it's, you get a question, and we all had readings that we could do, just writing those questions, but it was open to discuss anything that you wanted to discuss" (ST5, 2013). Having pre-reading texts to prompt critical thinking in preparation for the Socratic Circles dialogue "meant everyone was on an equal footing ...you had this central document that you were able to pick apart, and they/you were able to argue and debate your side or agree with other people" (ST2, 2013). The choice to include common texts for close reading established "a common ground" and focus for the dialogue (2013).



The opportunity to read and view the same texts “completely independently” was particularly interesting upon reflection: “then you come to a discussion where everybody’s had the same text, but everybody has viewed it very differently it made me think about how different people think and maybe my view of things isn’t the only way to interpret it” (ST1, 2013).

The impact of the time provided to read, digest the ideas of the text and distil one’s own ideas in preparation for the Socratic Circles dialogue was acknowledged as an element which enhanced “the quality” of the discussion “instead of having it handed to you, read it for two minutes and then sit in a discussion, to have that thinking time it does ...enhance the quality of what people are saying because ...they have actually had time to really think about it” (ST1, 2013).

The provision of reading and thinking time during the Critical Reading stage in the Socratic Circles process gave confidence to one student in their preparation for the Socratic Circles discussion. The issue for discussion was unfamiliar to him and he acknowledged that with the time to distil the information, he was able to prepare so as to contribute to the discussion:

Thankfully I did have those readings, because otherwise I would have just sat there and just absorbed the first circle and not actually had my own opinion because that wouldn’t have formed if I didn’t have the readings. (ST6, 2013)

### **Preparation for Socratic Circles discussion**

In traditional classroom discussion students may be set reading from subject textbooks in contrast to the variety of texts chosen as prompts for Socratic Circles: “having those readings, different readings from different sources is important.” This variety of source material introduced multiple viewpoints and broadened the scope of the discussion: “You were able to gather different points and combine certain points and form your own opinion and then put your own stance on it” (ST6, 2013).

In general, students recollected the power of the learning arising from informal activity. Informal learning, particularly as it led to greater understanding of others, took place during breaks in the formal schedule of activities and discussion, and during creative experiences that emerged from the Socratic Circles discussion, as shown in the following observations: “it allowed us to focus more on what we had in common as opposed to everybody presenting their point of view...you would be surprised how much we can take out of it, even though it’s not directly teaching us things” (ST4, 2013). Through the informal activities, including socialising,

students deepened understanding of each other including aspects of other faiths and “how that ties into their beliefs and how that’s integrated into their everyday life” (ST5, 2013). Some of the most memorable occasions for the student participants were the social interactions: “the lunch times, everybody sitting waiting for the buses and we are just having a chat” (ST1, 2013). There was a recognition that differences were noted but not important as encapsulated in the following insight:

Even that first day at Purim where we had this epic game of basketball on the basketball court where there was complete mayhem really, but it was kids being kids together and it totally—it didn’t matter. We were wearing crazy costumes that day, but one of the girls was wearing a headscarf and one of them had a Star of David around their neck. It just didn’t matter. (ST1, 2013)

### **The place of disagreement and conflict in dialogue**

Students had differing recollections and perceptions of an incident of disagreement and conflict, during a discussion. ST1 recalls it thus: “I vividly remember that discussion, these two very different opinions sort of clashing but not in an aggressive way at all ... we had a few very opinionated students, and it was a really lively discussion” (2013), whereas ST6 says: “When there was some heated discussion we were able to control that and discuss it calmly and rationally” (2013). Students felt freedom to express their opinions regardless of it being different to other opinions shared and this was recognised as a positive: “people actually benefitted, they learnt about a different perspective” (ST4, 2013).

One student expressed their view that the Socratic Circles process did not always result in equitable participation, it was not always successful in achieving its aims. The perceived failure of some discussions was attributed to an inability of some participants to allow others to contribute a divergent viewpoint as articulated:

I think sometimes it failed, and I think it failed because you had people who were so strong and who wanted to give their opinion and that’s great but they hadn’t learned yet that you give an opinion and then maybe ask someone of their opinion or you just hold back your opinion and let someone else speak. (ST2, 2013)

### **Sustaining skills and relationships**

There was a sense that sustained participation in the MIIC project provided opportunities to develop social confidence and skills as well as broadening the student participants’ outlook and extending their knowledge of others and other perspectives:

“Definitely it prepared me for university, because being in a religious school you don’t get much exposure to people from different faiths, other than the structured interfaith type activities” (ST4, 2013).

Students spoke specifically about the self-confidence that grew and their ability to overcome intimidating social situations having had numerous opportunities to practise their social skills and develop social confidence and competence. Illustrative of this sense are the following conclusions: “Definitely it prepared me for university, because being in a religious school you don’t get much exposure to people from different faiths, other than the structured interfaith type activities” (ST4, 2013); “You’ve got a broader knowledge, and with that you gain a little bit of confidence in yourself to be able to go out into, particularly going through high school to university” (ST5, 2013).

So I’ve gone, I went to a Catholic school from Prep to Year 12, so I’ve basically I’ve, I haven’t known the same people, but I’ve known the same type, like the same clique, the same type of people. So when you go to university you’re exposed to so many people of different faiths, different school groups, different, particularly different socio-economic backgrounds, and if I hadn’t have had this exposure in high school it would have been very intimidating for me to go to uni ... However, I think being in the Socratic Circles obviously you get this ability to discuss things and to speak publicly to people, and to express yourself in a way that’s not rude, it’s measured. And because we practised that quite a lot, it’s that I’m comfortable now if someone comes up to talk to me or something, I can just say, “Well, you know, this is what I think.” Whereas before that, say maybe Year 9 whereas we started in Year 10: Year 9 I wouldn’t have been able to talk to them. But I would have been very nervous. I didn’t really know how to get what’s in my mind through to words that will portray what I’m trying to tell you. (ST5, 2013)

In general, the students who were a part of the entire program of activities developed friendships which for some were sustained beyond the formal structured phase of the project. Students reflected upon what they gained from their involvement in the project and a recurring theme is friendships, as revealed in: “those friendships for me have built into some of the best friendships I have so that’s what I think of when I think of interfaith, is my friends really (ST1, 2013);

I gained some great friends and I had some really great experiences that I never would have had. There’s never been an opportunity to go to a Jewish school or an Islamic

school or even a state school. That opportunity isn't given at x and before this it never was and it was never considered as something important. (ST2, 2013)

For some students it was a personal aim to meet students from different cultural and faith backgrounds and although this may have initially been out of curiosity, genuine friendships developed and were sustained: "I still keep in touch with quite a few people from the interfaith. I see them, actually, really often" (ST3, 2013). The educational goals and social goals of the MIIC were met in relation to a deeper knowledge about issues in society as well as deeper understanding of others:

I've gained friendships and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet these people, and obviously you gain knowledge of your society...we still keep in contact with each other so that's one way of you knowing that it works. (ST5, 2013)

In relation to the relevance of the skills developed in Socratic Circles, one former student participant recounted using the pedagogical approach during pre-service teaching placements: "I stole the Socratic Circle idea in both placements that I've done for my education course" (ST7, 2013). In contrast with the lecture-style of some instruction, Socratic Circles encouraged participants to form their "own opinion" prompting close reading and critical thinking leading to the development perspectives, opinions and hypotheses to "defend" or "change" in a structured supported dialogue.

Reference was made to the intense experience of being a regular attendant at a variety of the MIIC gatherings. ST1 asserted that "Definitely for me, as an ongoing participant, every time you learnt more and it was reinforced again" (2011). As the MIIC project involved a representation of each of the participating five schools, some students did not attend activities as regularly as others. For those who attended fewer gatherings, the opportunity to establish on-going and meaningful friendships was limited:

If you didn't go to all of them and you didn't form those friendships, I know a few people did walk away wondering what the whole thing was about and why we had bothered doing it. I was lucky enough to go to all of them, so I was able to form those friendships. (ST2, 2012)

#### **5.4.3 Alignment of Experiences**

School leaders, teachers and students shared their reflections on the experience of observing and participating in Socratic Circles as part of the learning activities of the MIIC. A

number of aspects of efficacy were noted including the utility and transferability of the pedagogical approach given the provision of professional learning for teachers. The structure of the pedagogy involving concentric circles of dialogue and feedback promoted equitable participation. The pedagogy allowed for the teaching and learning of values, including critical reading to support negotiation of meaning and understanding. In addition, the structure and nature of the dialogue engendered deep understanding of the values in focus and opportunities to demonstrate these values in the dialogue. The pedagogy was both an intellectual exercise and a relational encounter as identified by school leaders and teachers, as well as the student participants.

### **5.5 Alternative Modes of Communication - Engagement and Transformation**

The opportunity to situate the experience in a global context reinforced the significance of the cultural exchange. Students from the MIIC were approached to present their experience of the program at the international conference of the Parliament of World Religions. The student presentation included accounts of the issues discussed during the Socratic Circles which led to the creation of artworks. The question and answer format at the conclusion of the presentation allowed the diverse audience members to explore and connect the themes of the students' account. This was a learning experience for staff and students, "a big thing for our students because we were able to see that what we are doing is not a small thing" (LT1, 2011).

The exhibition of the collective artworks created during the activities of the MIIC in four public spaces, including the Immigration Museum, Melbourne (Figure 5.3); Australian Catholic University Gallery, Fitzroy; Whittlesea Public Library; and, the Federation Square foyer of the Ian Potter Gallery, Melbourne, was a validation of the worth of the endeavour and had personal impact on participants, as reflected by LT1: "They were able to see the works so they felt good about it and came back and told the students" (2011).

An explicit focus on Values Education at a community level was regarded as a way of developing a sense of social cohesion. Social cohesion was considered a by-product of interactions involving groups from disparate faith and cultural contexts and was observed as having occurred through the activities of the MIIC. The students emphasised the creative aspects of the MIIC project as complementary to the overall aims of the experience. Music featured in a number of gatherings and a composition inspired by dialogue was performed by a group of students (Figure 5.2). The importance of this creative inclusion is captured:

The music I think was important because it was a way for a group of us to express our experiences and while x wrote it, we all participated in it and we made it into something that was really important to us. It was good, and it was a chance to perform. It was another way to demonstrate how the values program such as this could be incorporated into, a larger school system. (ST2, 2013)

**Figure 5.2. Extract of original composition inspired by Socratic Circles dialogue.**

**Sadness** Anthony Cardamone

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Another group performance including musicians from all participating schools was remembered as a unifying experience and connected themes and issues discussed during the day including during the formal Socratic Circles dialogue. One student observer of the collective musical performance shared their recollection of the significance of the event:

Having sat there and watched that performance...I will compare it now to the choir of Hard Knocks where they all came from different circumstances and they just brought themselves...they were brought together to produce a fantastic sound and very entertaining music... It was sort of like a summary of what we did that day, where we just came together and got to know each other and where the musicians got to know each other through sound and through music. (ST6, 2013)

The students drew links between the Socratic Circles discussion framework used throughout the project and the creative arts activities which allowed for more informal and less structured conversations and interactions. The recollection of ST4 was that “the discussion created a lot of ideas. It allowed people to think creatively and to collect what everyone thought and from that we could express it creatively, so we did the drama and the paintings” (2013); and the comment of ST1 who reflected that:

It’s interesting, because when I think about the interfaith, intercultural project, it’s definitely not Socratic Circles I think of first. But, I think they gave us the platform from which to build everything else because if you’ve had a fairly controlled, mediated, orientated discussion, it then makes walking up to somebody and just asking them a question that you always wanted to ask somebody who is Jewish, much easier, because you have seen kind of how they think and what they think, and maybe they don’t think that differently from you, whereas to break the ice cold can be difficult. So, yeah, I guess it’s almost the underlying thing in the project. (ST1, 2013)

The focus on social issues discussed within a structured framework leading to creative activity and opportunities for social interaction was significant according to student participants. Religious differences, customs, traditions and doctrine were not emphasised as the MIIC project was not an academic exercise in the study of world religions. This was appreciated by one student who expressed their feelings in the following statement:

If you just talked about religion, it’s just like we’re trying to educate each other. But with the wrong people it can almost be like our religion is better than yours, so it’s a very, very dangerous kind of thing to do. But because it’s about what bonds us, what connects us, you know, it was good. (ST3, 2013)

Throughout the project, students created artworks, often visual metaphors and symbols mediating the collective insights which emerged from the Socratic Circles dialogue. Figure 5.3., captures examples of artworks exhibited at the Immigration Museum as part of the Talking Faiths exhibition. The collective artwork throughout the program came from the ideas and insights emerging from discussion during the Socratic Circles. As LT5 reported, the artwork and art experience “came out of the Socratic dialogue really, which was the framework and the starting point for all of that” (2011).

**Figure 5.3** *The Talking Faiths exhibition.*



**Figure 5.4** *Artwork: We grow together.*



Artist statement: “The picture was inspired by our meetings and discussions where we put forward our ideas about immigration, cultural conflicts and identity. We grow together as one nation, we are different but the same. This picture was inspired by our forever growing nation, our forever growing identity and our forever growing knowledge. Different journeys, same destinations, we should embrace change and preserve identity.”



**Figure 5.5 Artwork: *United we stand, divided we fall.***



Artist statement: “This painting symbolises that no matter what race or religion you are, we should all come together to form a world of respect and dignity. Without unity, our world would become one of racism and prejudice. The people in this painting are connected by a chain. This chain symbolises a deep relationship between different cultures and beliefs. If we can’t respect others, then this chain will break and everyone will be divided therefore we need to stand UNITED.”

## 5.6 Accessibility

Any external program which takes senior students out of classes is expected to be met with opposition from some teachers. Unless the teaching staff can see the value of a program, and which part of the general curriculum it aligns with, then resistance is accentuated, as shown by a range of comments. For example, “some staff aren’t happy today that we’ve got some Year 11 students out because we’ve started our Year 12 courses and so they’re missing classes today. That’s always a challenge” (LT4, 2011). Schools created opportunities within their own schools to develop the project further beyond the formal funding timeframe by sourcing support through a variety of avenues. In one of the Cluster schools funding was secured through a chaplaincy program grant and used to build “a broader role” that provided time release for a staff member (LT5, 2011). Applying the learning of the MIIC in individual schools also allowed for elaborations of Values Education that were contextual such as environmental and sustainability issues.

The limited reach and life of the program meant that only a minority of students at each of the five Cluster schools were able to participate in the regular gatherings. Those students volunteered, applied, or were selected to participate. These students were characterised by openness to the aims of the project and were student leaders or had the potential to be chosen for positions of leadership. A teacher recalled the observation of a student participant who felt

that those who most needed the experience of the project were not the students chosen to participate:

He said the problem with these programs is that it attracts the sorts of kids who don't need this kind of education. This was the paradox. It was an interesting point of view because he said the intolerant kids in our year, need to be part of this. (LT6, 2011)

## 5.7 New Knowledge

The results of data collected from the three levels of stakeholders in the MIIC as presented represent a diversity of experience of the national program of Values Education reform. With consideration of the guiding research foci, the overarching aims of education as understood by respondents are shown to be interconnected with the aims of the Cluster's activity:

- The aims of education are articulated as complex, encompassing the basics related to knowledge and skills in concert with the development of personal and social capacities. Values are seen as intrinsic. Personal achievement as well as social responsibility are acknowledged
- The aims of the Values Education program broadly and more particularly the aims of the MIIC are understood as complementary.

Results suggest deep alignment between the pedagogical choices of educators in the cluster and the broad aims of Education, and Values Education more specifically. This alignment was achieved through *Transformational Dialogue* that acknowledges the application of dialogic pedagogies to promote meaningful learning and social encounters. Such pedagogies mediate and integrate a multiplicity of ideas. Additionally, dialogic pedagogies are able to differentiate the curriculum for diverse groups of learners. The Socratic Circles as a dialogic pedagogy is transferable across learning areas and year levels.

The Constant Comparative Analysis of data across three phases of data collection and three groups of respondents identified themes at the student (micro); leaders and teachers (meso), and government and system (macro) levels of engagement. Common to each level were the emergent themes relating to knowledge and skill development.

At the micro level of analysis, the key emergent themes included: instruction, information, development of the individual, formation, socialisation, development of the community, cultural awareness, understanding of the other, and social interaction. The Meso level themes included: critical thinking, lifelong learning, global citizenship, teaching values,

response to social concerns and socialisation. Unique themes at the macro level included: community membership, preparation for workplace, the role of schools in inculcating values, values at the centre of every educational endeavour, schools supporting democratic values, learning information and experiencing formation, opportunities for depolarising conflict, engendering interfaith and intercultural understanding.

It was evident that not all discussions were dialogic in the ideal of Socratic Circles. On some occasions, students were observed to be cautious with their opinions and feedback. This underscores the importance of ensuring that trust is built among participants and good quality feedback is scaffolded. The importance of providing scaffolded worked examples of specific, accurate, and constructive feedback (Hattie, 2012), is evident in the experience of Socratic Circles. In this study, student participants became increasingly familiar with the Socratic Circles discussion framework. This familiarity with Socratic Circles resulted in the reduction of teacher organisation and prompting of students as more natural dialogue including the expression of differing viewpoints emerged.

At a micro level of inquiry student participants contributed elaborations about the broad aims of education and the connections with the more specific aims of Values Education. At a meso level of inquiry, school leaders and teachers recognised the purpose of education as encompassing knowledge acquisition, skill development, and social capability towards preparation for lifelong learning.

At a government and system macro level of inquiry, the role of schools in preparing for responsible democratic citizenship in the wider community was highlighted. In addition, the potential of schooling to provide opportunities to develop communicative and interpersonal capacities for conflict resolution and understanding in a pluralist society were noted.

## 5.8 Transformational Dialogue: An Elemental Pathway

Following a process of analysis of all interview data, eight key elements of Socratic Circles Pedagogy (SCP) emerge. These elements summarised below represent an accumulation of the common themes identified by participants as integral to the efficacy of this pedagogy. Each element contributes to SCP in supporting, enabling or enacting transformational learning through dialogue.

The supporting elements;

*Creative Education* – prepares learners to be critical thinkers, with capacity for reasoning, negotiating meaning, and collaboration to create responses to issues and solutions to problems.

*Adaptive Leadership* – creates opportunities for teaching and learning which promotes personal and social transformation.

*Collaborative Partnerships* – promotes the importance of strong and mutually beneficial working relationships in, between, and across schools, sectors and systems.

The enabling elements;

*Applied Learning and Skills* – applies learning and allows opportunities for the demonstration of understanding in a variety of ways and contexts.

*Curriculum Alignment* – ensures curriculum is in service to the enduring and evolving aims of education.

The enacting elements;

*Shared Purpose* – reflects an agreed understanding of the purpose of education to inform and form.

*Cultural Literacy* - engages learners in educational experiences which utilise pedagogies encompassing culturally literate practices.

*Deep Learning* – develops communicative competence, intellectual depth and interpersonal capability.

These key elements are elaborated in the Discussion chapter that follows.

## 5.9 Conclusion

The key findings elaborated in this chapter are drawn from an expansive set of commentary at the three levels of inquiry. Student responses identified the significance of the dual purpose of education as an experience of being informed and being formed. The experience of the MIIC and the chosen pedagogy of Socratic Circles prompted a sense of learning, agency

and social membership which was generated from structured dialogue and relational and creative activities.

School leaders and teacher respondents reported the significance of learning as a lifelong endeavour and identified citizenship development as a core outcome of Values Education. As well, critical thinking was emphasised as was the responsibility of educators to engage in the socialisation of students. The benefits of Socratic Circles Pedagogy was acknowledged as a powerful process for enhancing dialogue and promoting social cohesion in an inclusive learning environment, as shown in the school leaders and teacher responses.

Respondents at the system and government levels discussed the overall role of schools in embedding democratic values and depolarising conflict for community membership and social cohesion. The significance of engendering interfaith and intercultural understanding was emphasised as was the effectiveness of Socratic Circles Pedagogy in supporting values education within curricular and co-curricular programs. One further point of emphasis was the recognition of collaborative approaches in the provision of innovative experiences.

In the Discussion chapter that follows an integrative framework is developed to offer a cohesive and comprehensive model of the concepts that arise from the analysis of the data from Chapter Five. The eight elements at the system, school and student levels, interact in the framework towards Transformational Dialogue providing an architecture for planning, designing and delivering powerful learning and relational outcomes.

## Chapter 6 Discussion

The results and analysis of the interviews have been presented in the preceding chapters. Key themes have been identified and the participant perspectives of Socratic Circles have been described. The focus of this discussion now turns to the development of a model for the strategic application of Socratic Circles Pedagogy.

Socratic Circles Pedagogy is known to provide a structure which enables dialogue and promotes critical thinking (Copeland, 2005). However, the extent to which it is a most appropriate pedagogical choice is evidenced by the participant data in this study. This chapter discusses the concepts arising from the data presented in Chapter Five, across the three levels of inquiry specifically, and introduces an integrative framework for supporting relevant, effective and sustainable educational reform. The connections between the research questions, new insights and the key elements at the integrated levels of inquiry are identified. This synthesis draws directly from evidentiary comments and relates this material to concepts and ideas introduced in the literature chapter of the study.

### 6.1 The Challenge: Polarisation and Conflict

A re-engagement with the aims of education to both inform and form the individual, prompts educators to consider this enduring aspiration in a contemporary context. That context being characterised by cultural pluralism and increasing polarisation of ideologies and realities leading to complex challenges and conflict. The terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001 signalled a seismic shift in the global socio-political landscape. Subsequent and related terrorist attacks in London, Paris, Berlin, Indonesia and many other parts of the world have contributed to the perception of a sustained threat and an undercurrent of fear of the other (Ferri, 2018). The rise of extremist terrorist groups saw the growth of Islamophobia. Feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation among a minority of young people led to a vulnerability to radicalisation of thought and violent action. The rise of neo-fascism and ultranationalism prompted reflection about the consequences of extremism and a growing destabilising of social cohesion including a worldwide refugee crisis.

Various Governments reacted to these realities with an increased emphasis on 'Homeland Security', 'Border Protection' and isolationist policies. Consecutive Australian governments have implemented such policies that remain in place in 2020. Such policies may

be inclined to encourage nationalistic fervour, entrench feelings of distrust and endorse antagonism towards the marginalised (Lester, 2018).

The role of the mainstream media in polarising thinking has been influential. However, with the rise of social and alternative media, networks of public commentary have established and led to a greater variety of views and more widespread coverage of significant social and political issues creating more democratic spaces for dialogue (Kaya, 2016). With this proliferation of digital engagement in civil discourse, citizens are able to share and challenge opinions and facts in an increasingly networked way leading to mobilisation and action (Barisione & Michailidou, 2017, p. 8).

Mindful of this social reality, the potential for education to respond to these challenges is worthy of consideration. If character is destiny and an enduring aim of education is to contribute to the formation of a person's character, then schools have a constructive role to play in creating cohesive communities. Such communities are made up of individuals who are able to relate, mediate and negotiate solutions and depolarise conflicts thereby enhancing humanity.

Addressing the complexities of social knowledge in contemporary education requires approaches to pedagogy which are both cognitive and relational in nature. In this respect, the school may be understood as a microcosm of the kind of humanity-enhancing communities we want to cultivate (Hawkes, 2007). Schools have a particular role in preparing citizens and leaders for the challenges ahead. While education more broadly has been thought to be “an instrument of democracy, enlightenment, and prosperity” (Fullan, 2019, p. 104), pedagogies which support critical thinking and communicative competence in learners are appropriate for enabling the learning and demonstration of values (Lovat & Toomey, 2009).

Contemporary pedagogical practices are increasingly incorporating strategies designed to promote deep learning. With the proliferation of knowledge-abundance enabled by digital technologies, pedagogies which prioritise the application and synthesis of knowledge are increasingly required to combat the challenges of surface learning and intolerance formation. Dialogue is a counterpoint to the individual nature of monologue and the competitive orientation of debate. Dialogue is collaborative in nature and requires an openness to learning from others. It leads to an awareness and understanding of self and others (Cam, 2006). The concept of dialogicality asserted by Bakhtin (1981) is predicated upon the understanding that no discourse exists in isolation but may be interpreted more broadly and contextually (Koschmann, 1999a, p. 139). Drawing on Bakhtin's contrast between dialogic and monologic talk, Hattie (2012) contends that where classroom talk is largely monologic, teachers miss

potential opportunities to explore inaccuracies and misconceptions (p. 83). The comprehensive suite of pedagogical choices acknowledged by Hattie as evident in the Paideia program initially developed by Mortimer Adler (1984) involves “a balance of three modes of teaching and learning: didactic classes in which students learn concepts and curriculum content; coaching labs in which students practise and master skills introduced in the didactic classes; and seminars in which Socratic-type questioning leads to question, listen, and think critically, and coherently communicate their ideas along with other group members” (Hattie, 2012, p. 85). Dialogic pedagogies can have a humanising effect on the learning environment, and they provide an opportunity to re-energise classrooms as democratic communities.

A dialogical approach to teaching and learning creates opportunities to develop knowledge and skills for constructive citizenship. The adoption of a dialogical approach to pedagogy which allows for a multiplicity of perspectives may reveal assumptions for consideration and re-evaluation. A pedagogy that promotes student voice and agency and creates a community of learners open to building on the knowledge and understanding of others is likely to better achieve the overarching aims of education espoused in the literature. Socratic Circles pedagogy is representative of such an approach.

There is an opportunity for educational institutions to deeply engage with the moral imperative of social cohesion which reflects authentic application of the vision of the Melbourne Declaration, and more recently echoed in the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Declaration. Values articulated in the National Framework of Values Education 2003 – 2010, and iterated in National and State Curriculum Frameworks currently, identify priority capabilities necessary within a national agenda for excellence and equity, and, within the goal of education for active and informed citizenship, namely: personal and social growth; creative and critical thinking; ethical and intercultural capabilities. Collectively, these capabilities serve to build and maintain social cohesion.

Schools and the systems which support them, play an increasingly powerful role in the education and formation of the individual. Developing participatory citizenship to counteract the destabilisation of local and international communities through pedagogies that instil deep learning, powerful action and strong relationships to enhance humanity represent a new creative core in 21<sup>st</sup> Century education.

The overarching intention of the MIIC was to explore, through dialogue and relationships, the values of understanding, responsibility and freedom towards social inclusion. The application of Socratic Circles Pedagogy was identified as most appropriate for achieving



the aim of learning about and demonstrating the values in focus. In fact, the nature of the dialogue enabled by this pedagogy can be considered transformational. This notion of ‘transformational dialogue’ emerges from the deep analysis of the data and is reflective of Bakhtin’s concept of Dialogicality. As such, Socratic Circles Pedagogy presents as an opportunity to “bridge the experiential abyss between ourselves and others” (Zappen, 2004, p. 7). Transformational Dialogue is defined here as *an enabling dialogic process that allows for depth of reflection, insight and learning through structured, focused and democratic interaction*. Within this process, the individual is both an agent of change and changed by the agency of others. When considering the educational imperatives of thoughtful consideration of contemporary issues such as an education in values, the achievement of transformational dialogue through the Socratic Circles Pedagogy is possible.

## **6.2 Towards an Integrative Framework**

The central aim of the MIIC was to provide opportunities for young people from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds to meet to discuss social issues related to identity, culture, race and ethnicity as they impact social cohesion. The choice of Socratic Circles Pedagogy for the learning activities in the MIIC resulted in the achievement of established aims of the interschool cluster. This aim aligned with the objective of the second phase of the National Values Education: Values Education Good Practice Schools – Stage 2 (VEGPS), which included an emphasis on intercultural understanding for the development of a cohesive society. The MIIC provided numerous opportunities for students to examine social issues and negotiate meaning related to values. The pedagogical choice of Socratic Circles enabled the achievement of this aim because the structure and process of the dialogue allowed for the demonstration of the values in focus: understanding, responsibility and freedom towards social inclusion. The review of Socratic Circles Pedagogy in the MIIC as the framework to support transformational dialogue for teaching, learning and demonstrating values, revealed the presence and interaction of eight distinct, but interdependent elements across the three levels of inquiry.

At the system level, structural elements support transformational dialogue. The first element *Creative Education* allows participant choice and agency to design and deliver creative pedagogies in service of the aims of the National Values Education reform initiatives. Creative education enables dialogic teaching as an approach supporting critical thinking, reasoning, collaboration for problem-solving complex issues and challenges. This element supports transformational dialogue. The second element *Adaptive Leadership* supports a distributed model of leadership with features of instructional leadership that energise and resource teaching

and leading, creating new spaces for learning and promoting personal and social transformation through dialogue. The third element *Collaborative Partnerships* supports a cluster model of partnership that allows for a diversity of participants and a multiplicity of perspectives.

At the school level contextual elements enable transformational dialogue. The fourth element *Applied Learning and Skills* allows participants to act out of the growing understanding of values and apply their critical thinking while developing communicative and interpersonal capabilities contributing to transformational dialogue. The fifth element, *Curriculum Alignment* enables participants to connect their learning experiences to the progression of learning in relevant curriculum across learning areas and capabilities. Building upon and connecting to prior learning contributes to transformational dialogue.

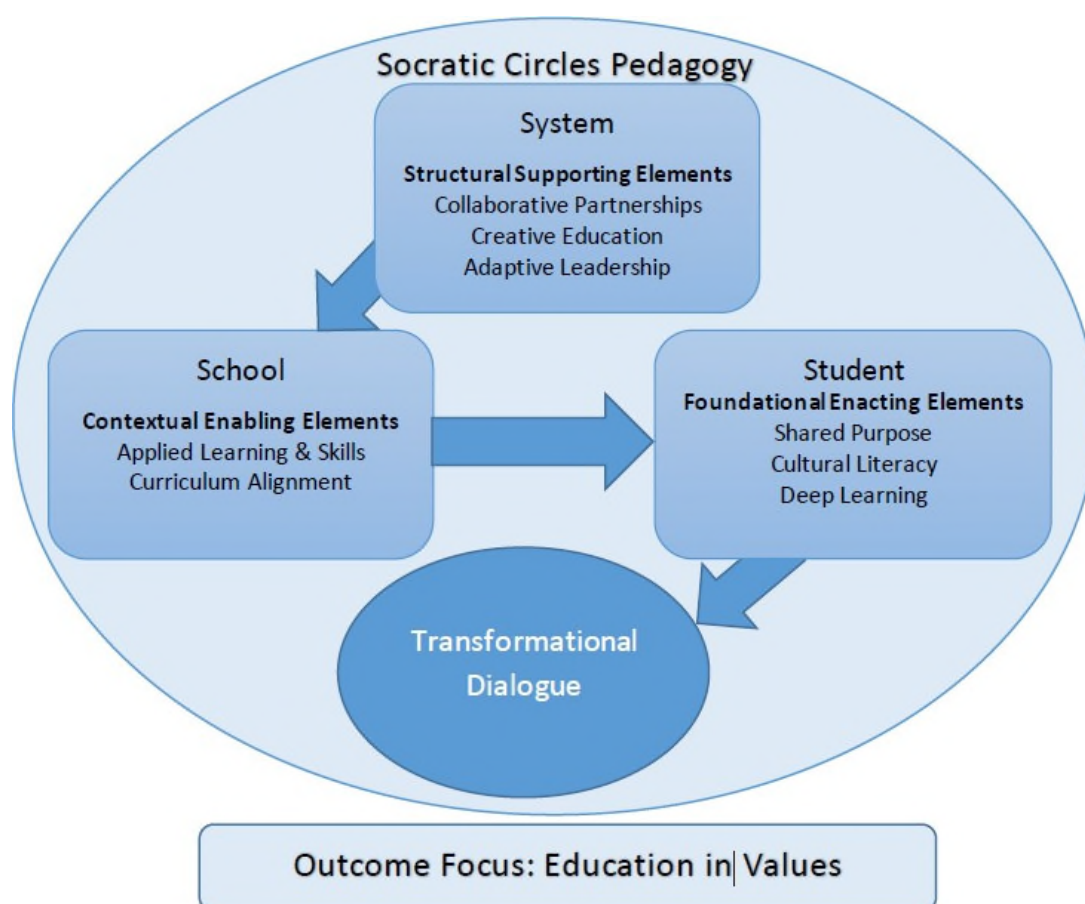
At the student level, foundational elements are enacted and evidenced in transformational dialogue. The sixth element *Shared Purpose* refers to the establishment and maintenance of the agreed aims of the MIIC within the broader system aims of the National Values Education reform initiative and connects deeply with the enduring and evolving aims of education. This element, enacted and sustained throughout the course of the MIIC program of gatherings, contributes to the realisation of Transformational Dialogue. The seventh element *Cultural Literacy*, a set of practices and negotiated meaning-making initiatives which developed as part of participation in the MIIC, also contributed to Transformational Dialogue. The eighth element, *Deep Learning*, facilitated by the Socratic Circles Pedagogy and critical to the achievement of the aims of the MIIC, was characterised by depth of engagement with issues and encounter with other learners.

This study investigated the design and delivery of the national reform agenda in Values Education as it applied to the case of the MIIC with reference to the application of Socratic Circles Pedagogy. The key insights that have emerged in analysis and summarised in chapter 5 give rise to the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework. This framework extends current understanding of the efficacy of Socratic Circles Pedagogy and positions its application as most relevant when seeking to engage in learning activities that require a depth of reflection such as in values education.

The Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework (Figure 6.1) shows the interplay between the key stakeholders in values education, the key stakeholders in effective pedagogy and the elemental experiences of benefit to all participants. The following sections will discuss this interplay to further expand an understanding of the model.

The integrative Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework (See Figure 6.1), brings together the key structural, contextual and foundational conditions and practices for the application of effective pedagogy as part of comprehensive curriculum reform for student learning. The framework identifies the overall outcome in Values Education; encompasses three levels of engagement specified in a primary goal and their elements - the system environment for government and non-government school policymakers and administrators; the school environment for leaders and teachers; and, the learning environment for students; and utilises an ‘arrow’ mechanism to depict the relationship among the key components. The model represents the key findings of this research and illustrates the complexity, integrative and dynamic aspects of values education and the importance of the Socratic Circles as a relevant and effective pedagogy in this process. This outcomes-focused approach achieved through Transformational Dialogue is Education in Values that underpinned the core aims of the MIIC. However, this model has application across many and diverse focus areas where deep learning is desired and facilitated through a dialogic approach that can foster critical thinking, engender communicative competence and develop interpersonal skill.

**Figure 6.1 The Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework: Values Focus.**



The summary of findings in Section 6.2 invite further analysis and prompt the elucidation of eight integrative elements which combine to comprise the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework for effective and sustainable educational reform regarding the use of Socratic Circles pedagogy in the teaching, learning and demonstration of values.

### **6.3 Achieving Transformational Dialogue through Socratic Circles Pedagogy**

Transformational Dialogue achieved through Socratic Circles Pedagogy is both a process and an outcome. The structural features of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework provide the architecture for the pedagogical process which promotes learning and relational outcomes. Transformational Dialogue is understood in the context of the learning activities of the MIIC to be both an intellectual activity and a relational encounter. It is able to draw together divergent ideas or experiences balancing the tension in a safe space of respect, seeking truth and connection. Transformational Dialogue is evident when students move from the theoretical to the enacted as they demonstrate the values of acceptance, tolerance, respect and understanding through dialogic practices. Transformational Dialogue was identified as a key outcome of the integrative, differentiated and creative pedagogy employed to scaffold the learning in the MIIC.

The Socratic Circles Pedagogy in the MIIC provided learning experiences, “to elicit immediate and responsive interaction among participants and between participants and the teacher” (Davey-Chesters, 2012, p. 29). From a student perspective, this learning process encouraged openness to the lived experience and opinions of others while allowing for freedom to express oneself fully and honestly. The structure and dynamism of the Socratic Circles approach to dialogue in the MIIC promoted equitable participation reflecting democratic communities of learners (Burgh, Field & Freakley, 2006). Learning took place through disciplined conversation indicating that the structure of Socratic Circles allowed freedom of expression conducive to participatory experiential learning (Copeland, 2005).

The Socratic Circles dialogue within the MIIC engendered the self-regulatory capacities of personal and social awareness and management among the student participants, characteristics of Transformational Dialogue. The outer feedback circle of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy cultivated active listening skills and encouraged participants to self-regulate, given the heightened sense of their own contribution within this structure. As ST1 commented, “I guess it was about ...the way I remember it is about an increased listening almost, because that outer circle’s sole role is to just sit and listen”. In the case of the MIIC, Socratic Circles

Pedagogy maximised Transformational Dialogue as a collaborative, inquiry-based practice that fostered freedom of speech and a multiplicity of viewpoints and perspectives.

A critical factor in the development of self-regulatory behaviours was the presence of silence (Davey Chesters, 2012). Those in the outer feedback circle were required to remain silent for the duration of the dialogue, observing, listening and note-taking in preparation for constructive feedback. The role of silent observer allowed participants to be attuned to the thinking and expression of others in a more intentional way than would have been possible if there was an expectation that they contribute to the dialogue. Silence within dialogue provides opportunities to think, digest, reflect and evaluate the thoughts expressed; “essential wait time” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 47).

Transformational Dialogue reflects the theory of internalisation (Vygotsky, 1987) which explores the transition of external thinking and dialogue internally into inner speech. This concurrent process of internal and external dialogue enables the inner dialogue to process the multiplicity of views in the interactive external dialogue. Where trust is built among participants in dialogue and good quality feedback is scaffolded and expected, peer-to-peer learning can be leveraged. The students in the MIIC identified the regularity of gatherings which included Socratic Circles dialogue as an important feature of involvement which allowed familiarity and trust to be built. In this study, relational trust was evidenced as contributing to deeper levels of learning and more authentic experiences of dialogue.

Transformational Dialogue can bridge the divide between cultural groups, transcending the historical differences which have typically separated groups. Such pedagogies provide an architecture for relationship-building, communicative competence and critical thinking leading to creativity and social cohesion. The expectations of respectful communication in Socratic Circles discussion align with the principles of restorative practice (Shaw, 2007; Short et al., 2018) and mediation and are complementary to pastoral programs in schools. Reinforcement of courteous behaviour and speech, turn-taking, active listening, constructive and considered criticism and positive reinforcement all align with the expectations of school policies on behaviour and conduct.

Sustainability of effective pedagogy requires some synchronicity with established programs and practice. The Socratic Circles approach was able to be transferred easily across curriculum areas and year levels to promote quality discussion featuring critical thinking, allowing deep learning and cultivating respectful relationships. In particular, the progressions of learning in curriculum areas such as English and Humanities provided opportunities to

integrate or reference values. Socratic Circles pedagogy supported the development of a balance between talking and listening, thereby maximising the outcome of Transformational Dialogue.

Transformational Dialogue is seen in students asking more questions than teachers, collaborative learning, exploring ideas and building upon ideas through inquiry and dialogue. An outcome of Transformational Dialogue is that learners are able to build upon their deeper understanding and express that in new ways. Teaching for creativity (Robinson, 2017, p. 227) facilitates the learners' creative imagination and work. Teachers employ open-ended questions, co-inquire when exploring possible solutions to problems and scaffold learners to make connections between different perspectives. The exhibition of the collective artworks created by students during the activities of the MIIC in four public exhibition spaces was a validation of student learning and creativity; an experience of wider learning that had a personal impact on participants.

An education in values can connect more specifically with fostering social inclusion and intercultural understanding when pedagogies support deep learning through a dialogic approach that promotes the very values it provides a framework to consider. In particular, when the subject matter of dialogues is contentious, Socratic Circles Pedagogy provides an appropriate framework which objectifies conflict and creates a safe space for a multiplicity of views to be expressed. Transformational Dialogue surfaces assumptions, perspectives and prejudices for exploration, examination and finally integration in a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

The use of Socratic Circles Pedagogy required a transformation of the physical space of the classroom. Instead of students focused on the teacher at the front of the classroom sitting in linear formation, seating arrangements comprised concentric circles—the inner circle engaged in conversation, while the outer circle was engaged in close observation. This re-organisation of the physical space of the classroom promoted self-awareness and management as well as respect for others and their point of view.

The choice to use Socratic Circles was appropriate in integrating values in discussions about cultural identity and social issues. However, Transformational Dialogue does not “just happen” as a result of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy. In essence, the emergence or transformation of participant interaction is a result of the confluence of eight key elements evident as a result of the structure and implementation of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy. These elements, constituent to the roles of the participants at the micro, meso and macro levels are identified as foundational and entail: - student enacting; contextual – school enabling; and, structural – system supporting, elements that maximise the possibility of achieving

Transformational Dialogue within a Socratic Circles process. Each of these elements are significant in their own right, but in combination, represent key markers of a successful transformative experience. Their contribution is discussed in the following sections.

#### **6.4 System: Structural Supporting Elements**

Three structural elements were shown to contribute to transformational dialogue in the case of the MIIC. These structural elements of *Creative Education*, *Adaptive Leadership* and *Collaborative Partnerships* were evidenced at the macro level of the system supported by guiding frameworks.

##### **6.4.1 Supporting Element 1: Creative Education**

*Creative Education* recognises that powerful teaching in the twenty-first century prepares learners to be critical thinkers, with capacity for reasoning, negotiating meaning, and collaborating with others to co-create solutions to complex issues in a rapidly changing workplace and society. The Socratic Circles Pedagogy provides the structure for learners to rehearse the kinds of capabilities and dispositions to engage and work with others in ways which are meaningful, respectful and productive.

At the system level, Federal and State governments and their statutory authorities provided structural conditions supporting creative education in values. The structure of school clusters meant that school leaders were able to consider new and innovative ways of working creatively ‘with’ rather than competitively ‘against’ other schools. The MIIC is an example of a creative education cluster bringing together schools from the three sectors of education: Government, Independent and Catholic; secular and faith-based groups; co-educational and single-sex educational settings; as well as geographically and socio-economically diverse schools. The system encouraged *Creative Education* by virtue of the freedom it provided for clusters of schools to interpret and design their own values education activities.

There was a clear connection between the aims of the values program and preparation for post-school study and lifelong learning, as noted by ST6: “I think they [the aims] were achieved because by the time I finished school, I had exposure to people from a variety of different backgrounds, and that provided me with, like, a very good foundation for dealing with university”. Within this study, it was shown that because of the design of the learning activities in the MIIC, students experienced learning with a diverse group of peers, and in the process, preparing them for later life experiences. Education which supports critical thinking and active

citizenship prepares learners for democratic society. It comprises learning that responds to ethical questions, and concerns rights, responsibilities and the way we live preparing learners for lifelong learning. The MIIC values project reflected this kind of educational experience as espoused in the literature (ACARA, 2018; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1998; West, 2004). Within this research, it was found that Socratic Circles Pedagogy and its organising features were conducive to the aims of values in education. Student participants asserted that the actual physical organisation of the discussion into a circle was complementary to the process designed to provoke thought and elicit contribution.

This study identifies the influence of pedagogical structures to enable learners to be challenged to develop personal, social and emotional capacities at the same time as they participate in deep learning tasks. The role of teacher in creatively adapting to the learning needs of the student is critical. The teacher is at times specialist or expert and at other times co-inquirer or engaged in modelling the scaffolding for the protocols and processes of the activity, maximising the growth of the learners through complex and varied activities (Howells & McArdle, 2007).

This study shows that the creative learning experiences of the MIIC orchestrated by dialogic teaching and learning prompted critical thinking and coherent communication. The dialogic nature of the interactions was understood to extend students' knowledge of others and their perspectives. Additionally, it was found that the self-confidence of student participants grew over the course of the project which included numerous opportunities to practise their social skills.

This research reveals the importance of learning experiences that support building relationships through dialogue and creativity to provide space, time and structure for adolescent learners to deepen their thinking about values, broaden their understanding of values, and activities to demonstrate their values. The Socratic Circles discussions and related creative expression of ideas enacted in the MIIC project allowed for the breaking down of stereotypes and the revelation of shared experience and humanity.

From a system perspective, schools were perceived as environments for developing and demonstrating active citizenship for life and clusters of schools were supported to design creative educational responses to foster values reflective of active citizenship. Powerful teaching reflects intentional deliberate decision-making around pedagogical choices for the content and context, always knowing the learner, and seeking to move the learner along a continuum or progression of learning. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is a concept



which endures. It simply captures the imperative to challenge and support each learner to grow in their learning in every learning encounter (Vygotsky, 1987). The support for the Socratic Circles pedagogical choice of the MIIC was shown to challenge and support learners in their understanding and demonstration of democratic values.

This research has shown that the skills developed through participation in Socratic Circles, such as analysis, critical and creative thinking, and communication, are relevant and transferable to the changing workplace of the twenty-first century. The study has emphasised the significance of the physical organisation of the learning environment during Socratic Circles discussion. Sitting in concentric circles facing one another was shown to promote fluent communication. In an adolescent culture bombarded with social networking often characterised by the increasing depersonalisation of communication, the study revealed that Socratic Circles cultivated active listening skills and developed personal and social awareness and management. This represented a departure from the more individualised, standardised emphasis of traditional learning activities and highlighted the pro-social nature of the Socratic Circles process.

This study has emphasised that critical thinking and analytical skills are increasingly necessary for twenty-first century learners and active citizens as students are required to build capabilities to navigate the exponential development of new technologies and workplaces. This is the essence of creative learning, the application of pedagogies such as Socratic Circles that equip students through processes that both demonstrate good practice along with advancing personal capabilities in good practice.

#### **6.4.2 *Supporting Element 2: Adaptive Leadership***

*Adaptive Leadership* recognises the role of leaders at system and school levels in designing, resourcing and delivering effective pedagogies, such as Socratic Circles. Adaptive leaders create opportunities for teaching and learning which promotes personal and social transformation.

At the system level, structures were in place to provide strong support for the leadership of the MIIC Cluster. This included support for *Adaptive Leadership* throughout the phase of the project. This entailed professional and organisational experiences within and beyond the school; specifically in leadership pertaining to pedagogy and content, the distribution of responsibilities within schools and where appropriate, facilitation of leadership within the student participants. Overall, the system supported the autonomy of the MIIC, and this

encompassed the development of leadership practices which were relevant to both the composition of the Cluster and the design of the learning activities within the project.

Within this research, *Adaptive Leadership* was required throughout the project and in different contexts encompassing vision, strategy, planning, and authority. Childs-Bowen, Mollerand and Scrivner (2000) assert that “Teachers are leaders when they function in professional communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (p. 28). Such an elaboration of teachers as leaders is an enactment of distributed leadership (Harris, 2005). From a school perspective, a number of factors were identified as enabling leadership conditions for reform as a result of their involvement in the MIIC project. LT8 asserts that “As long as you have the right people and the right skills and the right sort of framework that can happen in every school”.

This research has identified the effect that giving student voice, agency and leadership can have on a sense of ownership and engagement in learning. Students were given opportunities to take on leadership within the group during the regular gatherings of the Cluster as well as during open events organised to involve a wider group of students and community groups. From a student point of view, there was a sense of shared responsibility for the learning activities, as revealed in the following comments: “We had a bit more input into what was going on, and also it allowed me to gain leadership skills and obviously communication skills and just allowed me to see how these things run” (ST4). “There was one group meeting where I was the only student there, so I was encouraged to give my ideas a lot” (ST3, in 5.3.1.5). These comments reflect the experience of agency and leadership for the student participants in the MIIC project. In this study, students were acknowledged as active participants in the learning process, able to enact authentic democratic citizenship: “not dictated by orders or instructions from the education authorities...encouraged and permitted to express their views, appreciate the freedom to think for themselves and respect the views of others” (Commission on Human Rights, 2004, p. 22).

The experience of being on the Student Executive implied a special responsibility for student participants and was regarded as an opportunity and a privilege not extended widely. A key insight of this research is the importance of teachers acknowledging students as full citizens and esteeming students by providing leadership positions with authentic decision-making responsibilities. This aligns with the obligation enshrined in Article 12 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989), and explored by Lundy (2007) who entreats: “the practice

of actively involving pupils in decision-making should not be portrayed as an option which is in the gift of adults but a legal imperative which is the right of the child” (p. 931).

This study found that some participants were obvious leaders before the MIIC project, while other students realised their potential for leadership during the project. ST2 commented that “I’m not sure everyone would call x a leader, but x developed that as it went on”. Reflective of Voice-Inclusive Practice as a powerful enabler of young people to articulate their views and influence the provision of their own education (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015), those participants who were regular attendants at the MIIC gatherings had more opportunities to articulate their views and expressed a more intense experience as . . . . ST1 noted that “Definitely for me, as an ongoing participant, every time you learnt more, and it was reinforced again”. Such commentary reflects the impact of regular interfaith intercultural dialogue and socialisation, drawing on the understanding of learning that situates the learner as agentic, acting upon the world with others engaged in a transformative experience for self and others (Freire, 2000).

The students’ reflections reveal links with the findings from a significant review of the impact of leadership on student outcomes conducted for the New Zealand Ministry of Education using meta-analytic and other techniques (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). From this review, five leadership dimensions were presented: Establishing goals and expectations; Resourcing strategically; Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Having support at a system structural level ensures that these five leadership dimensions can be enabled by schools within Clusters participating in educational reform.

Notwithstanding flexibility in leadership applications, a top-down approach to educational reform was deemed necessary, at least in the initial stages, to achieve support to canvas the idea of collaborative partnership with the Cluster schools. The reform would not have been initiated in the Cluster schools without the authority of the Principal and subsequent provision of project resources for an educational policy to gain traction. From a school perspective, any reform needs to be led with conviction by principals and key administrators as acknowledged in the following quotations: “We had the Principal sign on. When the Principal signed on then you have funding, then you have no barriers to training. Then you have people definitely attending things...the best way for reform to be introduced is top-down” (LT6); “I think that top-down approach is very, very important, because it can’t, I don’t think you can lift it as much if it was simply at say a teacher’s level” (LT7).

In the *Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2*, the importance of school leadership is underscored, seen as “critical to the whole school integrated approach and to the success of any significant school change informed by values education” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 15). While this research considered the three levels of influence and impact through the MIIC project, participants at the system level asserted strongly that the commitment of the school Principal to any reform is critical to its success. Principals have “a major influence on the development and application of school policies and programs” (Dinham, 2016, p. 162). This view is supported by GS5, who asserts that “The Principal of the school has got to be on board with whatever the reform is”; and “If it’s a system-wide change, that change has to be very carefully introduced by the Principal, but then it has to be understood well—how can this fit to this school which might be different from the next school” and GS3, who notes that “The Principal needs to know about it (the reform) and needs to commit to have and really support whatever the initiative is”. These insights confirm the importance of Principals endorsing and resourcing reform in schools. For educational reform to be sustainable the principles of the reform framework need to be embraced and embedded in practice at all levels of leadership and learning at schools: “It has to be something that is embraced and embedded at all levels...it does require support from school leadership...and it requires resourcing” (LT5).

Leadership needs to resource the professional learning of teachers: “professional learning can be the critical factor between success and failure in developing sustainable values-based schooling” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 11). Through the Cluster structure, set out and supported by the system, it was acknowledged that reform requires the sustained and practical support of teachers. Teachers apply the theory, policy, and curriculum frameworks to their teaching with reasoning, making pedagogical choices which align with the learning objectives and outcomes.

*Adaptive Leadership* supported by the system structures for Cluster activities reflected the belief in persuasive rather than coercive leadership, such as is advocated in servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Advocates of servant leadership describe the benefits of cultivating the skills to bring people to an understanding of change such that they see the need for change themselves, and can identify achievable outcomes and are self-motivated to engage rather than be coerced into what they are not committed to or motivated to enact.

In the MIIC project, teachers from a diverse range of school contexts had the opportunity created by the system to work in a community of leaders who shared responsibility

for effective change. The Cluster Coordinator and School Coordinator roles were recognised as essential to the organisation and momentum of the specific programs. It was evident that while specific individuals had responsibility as part of their role descriptions for organising structured meeting schedules, professional learning sessions and student meetings in and between schools, it was essential that the leadership was distributed. A key insight of the study is the importance of embedding the language and practice of values throughout the schools to ensure widespread application of reform is not reliant on any one person: “If there is no common values language, if the values within the school are neither owned nor shared by the school community, there can be no basis for implementing effective, planned and systematic values education” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 9). Furthermore, the effectiveness of team or cluster leadership was found to rely on shared power, authority and accountability. In a national (US) research study in effective leadership (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), the following reflection resonates with the reflections of the school leaders and teachers in the MIIC project,

Leadership in a school is a phenomenon that is both practiced and experienced...leadership practices that share power are credited with creating greater motivation, increased trust and risk taking, and building a sense of community and efficacy among its members. However, peer relationships established among adults may have an equal or greater impact on classroom practice. (p. 467)

In relation to school culture, some schools identified areas where their work in values was well-established but requiring reflective practice and vigilance. Involvement in the formalised program of values education required an audit of current work and evidence of commitment to supporting values. LT2 noted that, “We reflect upon our practices, to ensure that we are being faithful to what we say”.

*Adaptive Leadership*, inclusive of instructional leadership, was evidenced in the MIIC project. School leaders and teachers led professional learning, including modelling of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy, supporting literacy development as the learning process required a close reading and articulation of issues related to personal and national identity, displacement and belonging, active and passive citizenship, social conflict and cohesion.

It was evident that particular pedagogies such as Socratic Circles can prepare young people for dialogue which focuses on conflict or conflicting ideas because it provides structure and clear purpose (Forrest, 2009). It represents a pedagogical approach which can be used in an attempt to “reduce the fear and anxiety of individuals and, thereby, encourage silenced voices to engage in dialogue that are essential in democratic institutions and societies” (Simpson &

Hull, 2011, p. 7). It was evident that instructional leadership is necessary when integrating a pedagogy as part of a whole school and interschool approach to values education.

Professional learning of staff supported by instructional leadership (Dinham, 2016, p. 145) is required for transference throughout the school in curricula and co-curricular areas. From a school perspective, distributed leadership manifested in multiple student leadership opportunities is understood as a critical element of the project's effectiveness. Students involved were given responsibility for the selection and carriage of varying types of activities conducted throughout the process engaging them at a deeper level in the process.

This research included observations by teachers involved in the MIIC project activities of the growth of students involved in relation to their confidence, competence and leadership. This echoes the literature which characterises education as growth, exploring the realms of habits (Dewey, 1916). The measure of the value of school education is the extent to which it creates in learners the desire for continued growth and the means to enable that growth:

Active habits involve thought, invention, and initiative in applying capacities to new aims. They are opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth. Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself' (Dewey, 1916, Part 4: Summary).

The features of effective professional learning of teachers outlined by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) were present in the MIIC project including: material which is content focused; incorporates active learning; supports collaboration; uses models of effective practice; provides coaching and expert support; offers feedback and reflection; and is sustainable. This research confirms the necessity to provide effective professional learning to ensure that teachers are competent and confident to apply their learning for improved student learning outcomes, as observed by GS3, "The professional learning of teachers is an effective way of embedding practice and sustaining reform". A critical factor in the delivery of high-quality professional learning for teachers in the MIIC was strong instructional leadership modelling and scaffolding Socratic Circles Pedagogy.

This study has shown that unless the responsibility for the implementation of educational reform is written into the role description of a member of the teaching and/or leadership group within a school, the sustainability of the project may depend upon individuals remaining at schools who are committed to the continuation of the project. This research has emphasised the benefit of promoting a distributed leadership model as extension of *Adaptive*

*Leadership* supporting capacity among leaders at all levels of the project to share responsibility for the application of the project aims.

It was found that the implementation and sustainability of the MIIC depended upon the support of the schools' principals and following from that, the commitment of the coordinating teachers. In addition, the study has emphasised the need to communicate the purpose and nature of the Values Education learning activities to students so that they have a depth of understanding of the reform agenda and appreciate the value of the activity and their place within it.

### **6.4.3 Supporting Element 3: Collaborative Partnerships**

*Collaborative Partnerships*, acknowledges the importance of strong and mutually beneficial working relationships in and between schools, sectors and systems enabling powerful dialogic pedagogies to engage diverse groups of educators and learners in partnerships which lead to teaching, learning and demonstrating values.

At the system level, there was support for *Collaborative Partnerships*. The structure of the Cluster model engendered collaborative dispositions and practices among the participating schools. The Federal and State Education departments and their statutory authorities worked in concert to develop the parameters within which the values education program could be developed. This plan was articulated and then schools within clusters were authorised and supported to create educational experiences building collaborative partnerships throughout the process.

This research identifies the key structural supporting conditions for implementation of the MIIC project at a school level including the provision of funding to allow resources to be allocated to support the participating teachers to apply the principles in pedagogical practices.

Within the broader system context, the second phase of the national Values Education program was intended to work towards the vision of the National Framework of all Australian schools providing meaningful and effective values education in a "planned and systematic way as a central aspect of their work" (DEST, 2005, p. 3). Clusters of schools were supported to design projects to undertake values education in and between schools for whole system learning (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 7).

Funding was provided to successful clusters in the second phase of the reform agenda, and the implementation of Values Education across all key learning areas also addressed values

in intercultural and global contexts. Providing the financial resources to allow for the school Cluster work was a critical factor in the success of the MIIC. Funding allowed for the practical considerations of introducing and consolidating reform initiatives at a school level. From a school point of view, it was evident that the investment of personnel, time, timetabling flexibility, professional learning, and development and training required a collaborative partnership in and between schools, sectors and systems.

This study identifies the importance of shared learning experiences between teachers from different school and sectors. Supported by system structures, the formal program organised around clusters of schools, provided an opportunity for schools themselves to re-visit and re-examine the authenticity of the existing school practice as it related to values education comparing their school culture and practices to other school communities. “It’s kept us honest and constantly challenged us as well. To be honest to the reforms and to the values” was the view of LT2. The cluster model fostered a culture of accountability.

The literature aligns with the notion of ‘systemness’ (Fullan, 2014) as a key driver of sustainable improvement as it involves “Partnership with the sector, establishing a commonly owned strategy in the system as a whole”; building the capacity of teachers for “Focusing on powerful pedagogies linked to deep student learning”; and committing to “Purposeful collaboration with other schools/districts” (2014, p. 1). These features were shown to be evident in the *Collaborative Partnerships* cultivated in the MIIC. Moreover, the Cluster project provided a springboard for other related programs of values education, further validating the participation in the initial project.

Within this research participants at a school level noted that the structure of the project within a cluster of five schools demanded another level of accountability beyond the immediate singular school context. This was evidenced in the transparency of the learning. Additionally, it was found that the organisational structure of the Cluster facilitated further self-reflection and evaluation on the part of individual schools within the Cluster.

The structure of clusters chosen for the Values Education project was supported by effective professional learning which incorporated “ongoing models such as the use of learning communities, objective critical friends, mentors, and collaborative peer exchange, as well as time for reflective practice” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 11).

A key finding of this research is that a short, medium and long-term change management strategic plan must be designed and implemented in accordance with the culture of the individual educational organisations. Without a contextual approach that is consultative, it is



unlikely school leaders and teachers will commit to change. The view of GS5, “If it’s (reform) been brought about by enforcement rather than collaboration, you can’t then expect that that will happen within the classroom.” Such a position is supported by the literature (Campbell and Erbstein, 2012) that effective school-community partnerships are mediated by boundary spanning leaders, who work with community groups skilfully and sensitive to the needs of all stakeholders (p. 15).

It is acknowledged that educational reform is not valued if it is short-term and aligning with a specific political agenda and cycle. Where this is the case, there is time only to initiate and implement in a temporary manner but not sufficient time to comprehensively evaluate and report on programs. A further comment regarding this insight was made by GS2: “It wasn’t offered as something carved in stone that schools had to do, it wasn’t mandating that you must have 90 minutes teaching about, about those nine values. It was recognising the eclectic nature of Australian education”.

The Values Education initiative received bi-partisan support during its implementation (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, pp. 13–15). A critical factor in the achievement of the aims of the MIIC project was the choice of transferable and relevant pedagogies which were able to integrate values into existing curriculum programs. Building context and a clear methodology for the project was a key to encouraging schools to ‘buy-in’ to the project. Schools responded to the invitation to engage and involve other schools in the partnership cluster approach. Providing clear direction to schools and clusters to collect evidence of the learning in the project was significant and added an important layer of accountability.

From a system perspective the cluster model of collaboration supported a diverse range of groupings and learning experiences. It was noted that for some groups the cluster structure allowed for dynamic professional learning communities to evolve. The cluster model facilitated diversity of learning communities. It was evident that the Values Education program was a vehicle for fostering intercultural understanding, social cohesion and social inclusion (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 42), and the Cluster model design strengthened that development.

This research identifies both the influence of the leadership of federal and state education bodies on educational reform and the reality of short-term reform unless bipartisan support is proffered to ensure sustainability and system transference. Collaboration was a key factor in the implementation of the values initiative across the system and sectors of education.

Schools and teachers responded favourably to the nature of the reform as a framework, not as a prescriptive curriculum course. This allowed schools and clusters to determine how they would apply theoretical perspectives to their own school contexts. The study identifies the collaborative cluster model of interschool interaction for educational and social purposes as meritorious; one that seeks to counteracts a silo mentality and competitive approach to education within and across schools and systems. Additionally, the promotion of a collaborative approach, characteristic of the cluster model, encourages individual schools to evaluate their own educational practice in comparison to other schools. This study confirms that this leads to improved outcomes in relation to teaching practice and the understanding and application of values with participants.

In this research it is clear that Values Education continues to be a highly contested area of educational reform that requires widespread investment of resources for implementation and sustainability if it is to be part of a response to the imperative of education to develop character in citizens. This study reinforces an understanding that, more than ever, schools play a crucial, though at times demanding, role in both forming and informing individuals.

The research shows that the National Framework for Values Education provided a collaborative structure for numerous schools to initiate innovative programs and/or enhance existing programs related to character, community and citizenship. The provision of funding gave schools, working within a supportive cluster design, the time and resources necessary to develop projects. The study confirms that educational reform is dependent upon effective leadership, vision, strategic planning, buy-in of stakeholders at all levels, and continuous support.

### **6.5 School: Contextual Enabling Elements**

Two contextual elements were shown to contribute to Transformational Dialogue in the case of the MIIC. These contextual elements of *Applied Learning and Skills* and *Curriculum Alignment* were evidenced at the meso level of the school enabled through Socratic Circles Pedagogy.

As a framework for discussion, the Socratic Circles structure was shown to be both challenging and supportive for students. The student participants were expected to participate in both the discussion as a member of the inner circle, and in feedback as part of the outer circle. The framework demands that students focus on the discussion in a more attentive way than in traditional classroom discussions. LT4 commented that “It also challenges every student. It also

provides a way of making students focus on the discussion, particularly when ...they're in the outer circle and the inner circle" (5.3.3.2); and the observations of LT5, "It certainly makes you reflect more on exactly what you're going to say" (5.3.3.2); and LT6, "Pre-warning is good for some topics. Not a lot of topics are easy to grasp straight away by students. They like to be slowly led into it" (5.3.3.2) further elaborate that demand. There is an expectation that students are prepared with notes and questions to participate and actively seek to engage others in the dialogue through questioning. The use of an evaluation rubric (Appendix B) (Copeland, 2005) at the conclusion of the Socratic Circles process was acknowledged as providing a prompt for continuous improvement and reflects both the challenging and supportive nature of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy. Vygotsky (1987) explored the zone of proximal development (ZPD), that space of natural ability from which a learner can progress to potential ability through scaffolded instruction and interaction with the teachers and others (Vygotsky, 1987). In this study the scaffolds provided by teachers pre and post Socratic Circles discussions allowed for progress and growth for learners.

The feedback feature of the Socratic Circles methodology added an important layer to the depth of thinking and communication. When the participants were receptive to improving their communication skills and/or knowledge of the issue at hand, it was shown to be a particularly effective feature of the discussion. It is evident that this discussion process works to the extent that participants are open-minded and committed to the process.

In a number of instances, students were responsible for the preparation of notes and questions. On each occasion students led the dialogue and could not rely on the teacher to provide prompts and generate discussion topics. From a school viewpoint, "young people now don't accept things without the opportunity to engage and to examine and to criticise and come to a deeper understanding of things" (LT5). The role of the teacher needs to be responsive to the learners and their learning needs. At times the teacher takes on the role of expert or specialist, other times, the teacher is model or witness, and where relevant, moderator / facilitator (Sharkey, 2016). The pedagogical choices made by teachers should reflect knowledge of the student, the content and how to teach the content (AITSL, 2015).

The role of teacher in supporting and scaffolding the learning process of Socratic Circles is crucial to ensure that students fully engage in the dialogue. Although the study found that students behave and learn more autonomously in the Socratic Circles process compared with the lecture-style instruction of traditional classrooms, the role of teacher in facilitation, scaffolding and feedback is acknowledged. If the teacher does not provide scaffolds for the

feedback including, where necessary, exemplar stems to begin and expand on feedback (Appendix D), then the process can suffer. Similarly, where teachers did not model and facilitate good communication skills and dispositions, it was shown that students were less likely to be responsive.

### **6.5.1 *Enabling Element 1: Applied Learning and Skills***

*Applied Learning and Skills* recognises the importance of pedagogies which allow for the application of learning and demonstration of understanding in a variety of ways and contexts. Connecting learning which takes place through Socratic Circles dialogues to creative expression consolidates that learning and deepens understanding.

At the school level, leaders and teachers were able to apply the professional learning and skills acquired during their involvement in the MIIC project to their work more broadly. In the context of their teaching, the Socratic Circles Pedagogy was applied within and beyond the Values Education project. This had a further flow-on effect, enabling students to develop and apply their learning and skills in critical thinking and communication.

The participant students acknowledged the impact on their learning and their capacity to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills. As the purpose of education encompasses the development of life-skills, content or academic knowledge, the ability to think critically and make decisions that reflect positive societal values resulting in the development of the whole child (Connor & Greene, 2006), the MIIC project objectives and outcomes align with the enduring and evolving aims of education. In addition, if education is to “help students develop knowledge about themselves and the world and to become a contributing, valued member of society” (Power, Southwell, & Elliot, 2007, p. 3), the evidence from this study is affirming.

The student reflections detailed in Chapter 5 offer insight into the students’ experience of growth in confidence, understanding of self, and an increased capacity to negotiate unfamiliar social situations and learning experiences.

A distinguishing feature of the Socratic Circles discussion structure that supports the acquisition of *Applied Learning and Skills* is the outer circle, or feedback group. The concentric circles have an equal number of students in each with the discussion circle in the middle of the room, and the other half of the student participants in the outer concentric circle who pay close attention, listening and observing (Figure 4.1). As they observe they follow guided questions and write responses to the inner circle dialogue about the issue or provocation. At the conclusion of the inner circle discussion, the outer circle provides positive feedback to specific individuals

or the group and also provide general comments in relation to areas for improvement. From a student perspective, it was acknowledged that the element of the outer circle provided opportunity to develop critical thinking skills and personal communication skills.

Consistent with the literature, the learner experience of being in the feedback group involved metacognition (thinking about thinking) and metadialogue (dialogue about dialogue), both features of dialogic learning environments (Nottingham, J. A., Nottingham, & Renton, 2017, p. 65). A key finding of this research is that the structure of the Socratic Circles dialogues, including disciplined observation, engendered metacognition and metadialogue in an engaging and deliberate way for learners in the MIIC. Furthermore, from a student perspective, it was shown that the experience of being in the outer circle resulted in a heightened sense of self-awareness. Students attributed the inclusion of an outer observational circle, and the expectation of receiving feedback from peers, increased self-regulation prompting them to be more inclusive and thoughtful.

The Australian Curriculum “Personal and Social General Capability” guides teaching and learning related to self-awareness and self-management as well as social awareness and social management. It asserts that:

Students with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, develop resilience and a sense of self-worth, resolve conflict, engage in teamwork and feel positive about themselves and the world around them. The development of personal and social capability is a foundation for learning and for citizenship. (ACARA, 2019, s. 1)

These general capabilities as described in the key national curriculum framework document encapsulate the kind of learning experienced and described by student participants in Socratic Circles as part of the learning in the MIIC which was found to have promoted self-regulatory behaviour.

It was evidenced that during the informal and incidental social interactions of the participants, relationships were built around respect and openness and resulted in the building of trust leading to a deeper understanding of others. This aligns with the research which suggests that students learn in social environments within which they are connected through meaningful relationships (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 63). It was shown that students within this project developed interpersonal connections and insight into themselves while collaborating with others with clear purpose and intention. According to the goals of education as set out in the Melbourne Declaration which provided directions for Australian schools for the period 2008–2018

(MYCEETYA, 2008), schools play a critical role in “promoting social cohesion” operating in a context of “global integration” and “international mobility” which behoves educators, “to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship” (MYCEETYA, 2008, Preamble).

A significant finding of this study is that the creative activities of the project were an important extension of the expression of ideas in the Socratic Circles discussion. In this study, students made links between the Socratic Circles framework and the creative arts activities which encouraged more informal, less structured conversations and interactions. ST4 said that “the discussion created a lot of ideas. It allowed people to think creatively and to collect what everyone thought and from that we could express it creatively, so we did the drama and the paintings”.

Research into how and what students learn revealed among other things that students learn some of the concepts and principles of specific units of work from private peer talk (Nuthall, 2007). According to the Learning Continuum of Critical and Creative Thinking, Level 6 of the Australian Curriculum, by the end of Year 10, students should be able to engage in learning opportunities where they imagine possibilities and connect ideas using imagery, analogies and symbolism (ACARA, 2019). This research shows that student participants in the MIIC built upon the ideas discussed and distilled in the Socratic Circles dialogues and expressed the essence of those ideas in enriching creative endeavours.

From a student perspective, the creative aspects of the MIIC project were complementary to the overall purpose of the experience to engage with a diverse group of adolescent learners in dialogue regarding values and related issues, taking into account the creative talents and interests of the students. Teachers leading the program of learning activities provided opportunities for students to explore creative arts in collaborative ways encouraging socialisation and deeper levels of learning.

This research identifies the influence that the Socratic Circles discussions had on the creation of collective artworks throughout the project. The ideas and insights emerging from discussion in the Socratic Circles were the foundation from which the art was created and curated. From a teacher perspective “(the artwork and art experience) came out of the Socratic dialogue really, which was the framework and the starting point for all of that”.

Student participants in the MIIC were challenged to reflect more deeply about their own faith and faith development as they became representatives of their own schools and their own faith traditions in the Cluster of five schools. They answered questions about their own faiths

and cultural backgrounds and were inquisitive to learn about one another's religion. It was shown that students underwent a process of reflection and discernment which was, for many students, a confirmation of what was unique about their own faith and identity. Teachers reported that some faith leaders reported an initial fear that by encouraging and facilitating interfaith dialogue among young people, the program might threaten the faith development of individual students. However, from a school leader perspective, it was evident that involvement in the program provided an opportunity for self-reflection and exploration of faith development.

The personal and social dimensions of the learning opportunities for students in the MIIC provided opportunities for encountering and interacting with others. From a system point of view, this social dimension of learning is a critical part of the rehearsal stage for interacting with others throughout life.

This research affirms a scaffolded approach to values education allowing for the applied learning of values through knowing, understanding, being and doing, thus cultivating the development of interpersonal skills. These skills encompass self-awareness and other-awareness aligning with the General Capabilities of the National Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) and the Victorian state iteration, Victorian Curriculum (VCAA, 2016).

Students often require scaffolding to understand the purpose of a learning experience. An intention of scaffolding is the provision of explanatory and belief structures that organise and justify (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Sound pedagogical choices support student development and teachers play a key role in scaffolding and modelling the characteristics of a good citizen. This research exemplifies the reasoning behind the pedagogical choice of Socratic Circles. Socratic pedagogies have the potential to develop both the social and intellectual capacity of learners as they prepare for active citizenship, to be agents of democracy (Davey-Chesters, 2012).

This research confirms the influence of curriculum frameworks and nationalised education programs in supporting the teaching of interpersonal communication skills providing opportunities to socialise. Schools have been supported through the implementation phase of the Capabilities of the Victorian Curriculum (VCAA, 2016), with the provision of resources to ensure that teachers are able to design and deliver units of work, assess and report on the standards and achievement levels for each of the four identified Capabilities: Intercultural, Ethical, Personal and Social, and Critical and Creative Thinking.

This research identifies the influence that curriculum implementation has on the sustainability of a new educational reform initiative. Values Education has continued in

different guises in different contexts, linking with established programs and curriculum areas, and dovetailing with others.

This study emphasises the pressure on schools to accommodate new educational reforms in the already crowded curriculum (Jensen & Kennedy, 2014). From a system perspective, the solution is to integrate reform such as values education into existing programs and curriculum areas.

### **6.5.2 *Enabling Element 2: Curriculum Alignment***

*Curriculum Alignment* reflects the need for curriculum in service to the enduring and evolving aims of education. A curriculum which supports progressions of learning for all learners and prioritises dialogic pedagogies engages learners. At the school level, leaders and teachers observed the alignment of the MIIC values education project with existing curriculum. This enabled members within the different school community contexts to invest deeply in the project. The alignment with curriculum, including the general capabilities, enabled the resourcing of the project as members of the school communities made the connections with the project aims and outcomes.

From a school perspective, any curriculum initiative needs to align with the overall curriculum framework, including the learning and teaching objectives, assessment and reporting expectations and deliverables of the school's strategic plan. *Curriculum Alignment* is the starting point for decision-making about "what is to be taught, the appropriate complexity, and the desirable goals" (Hattie, 2012, p. 63). LT4's statement, "The fact that ...if it's enriched your curriculum then it becomes part of your curriculum and so...the results of the program are maintained. The really important things become part of your curriculum" supports this. The incorporation of the Values Education program in school handbooks, mission statements and other documents to support the integration of the program into the daily running of the school was critical. This is particularly important as recent research reflects on conclusions that school mission statements tend to be dominated by academic-orientated themes (Allen et al, 2018).

This research identifies factors enabling successful learning outcomes of Values Education programs. In order to sustain a program of this type beyond the funding phase, it has been shown that it is critical that schools independently commit to re-envisaging the program in ways that do not depend on external support so that the initiative is established and consolidated in school culture and other school learning endeavours. LT4 asserts that "the challenge is to keep it going in different ways that don't cost money that become part of the



school program” and LT5 remarks that “there’s a point beyond which you stop selling the vision and you just do it, and then the actual immersion in something sells it to people who are not necessarily supportive or who are like-minded”. Schools were able to sustain aspects of the Values Education program through their adoption of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy which was embedded in teaching and learning practice.

In the summary statements of *The Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2* (Bereznicki, et al., 2008), the importance of establishing and consistently using a common and shared values language across the school is reinforced: “In a values-based school the shared values language comes to inform everything that school does and says. It underpins pedagogy, leadership, planning, policy positions, curriculum practices and behavioural expectations” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 9).

It was evidenced that continual interaction through the connections made during the interschool Cluster project was essential to the longevity of the initiative, as reflected in “To maintain the momentum you need continued interaction” (LT6); “We still maintain our connections with a lot of the other schools that we do a lot of the interfaith activities as well” (LT7). The relationships initiated and established during the initial stage of the Values Education formal project, were sustained beyond the funding period.

In this research the MIIC was recognised as an exemplar of effective values education and described by system leaders as, more than “an academic exercise; it needs to be deeply personal, deeply real and deeply engaging” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 11).

Participants who work at an education system and government policy level identified the potential impact of effective values education, as noted by GS1 in “Effective Values Education provides a great opportunity to explore the rationale, the priorities, the important things that people want to see in the educational experience”. This research has identified new understandings of the concept of an education in values as necessarily integral to the aims of education regardless of whether or not there is a formalised program called Values Education. It is through effective pedagogies that learners experience an education in values. The choice of Socratic Circles pedagogy maximised opportunities for effective values education, thereby providing students with learning and creative opportunities to explore and articulate their understanding of particular values and demonstrate these through dialogical encounters.

This study recognises that some iteration of values education is necessary for educators and learners in order to navigate the inevitable challenges associated with exponential change driven by new technologies and rapid globalisation as identified by UNESCO, “The tensions

between ...the global and the local; the individual and the collective; tradition and modernity; long- and short-term considerations; competition and equality of opportunity; the expansion of knowledge and the capacity to assimilate it; and the spiritual and the material” (Delors, 1996, pp. 16–18).

Dialogic teaching employed and aligned across curriculum learning areas offers an avenue for depolarising persistent contradictions and conflicts. Article 29 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989) provides a guide for engendering respect for one’s own and others’ cultural identities, including,

(c) The development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. (UN, 1989, [Article 29, (c), (d)])

The polarisation and politicisation of educational reform can be a barrier to improved learning outcomes for students. It was shown that initially the issue of values in schools suffered from the perceived politicisation of the project and the choice of the motif of ‘Simpson and his Donkey’ alienated some educators who felt that a preoccupation with one representation of the value of mateship was jingoistic and reductionist (Brown, 2007, p. 229). Distinguishing between Australian values and values for Australian Schooling was important to the validity of the national reform initiative. This was reflected in GS2’s assertion that “the whole debate around the iconography around the framework, used Simpson and his Donkey as a very classic case of how delicate this political balance was”.

These quotations reflect the controversy concerning the iconography and the necessity to establish a shared understanding of the purpose of the national program and resonance with the values as presented in the National Framework. This includes recognising them as the “Nine Values for Australian Schooling: Care and Compassion; Integrity; Respect; Doing Your Best; Fair Go; Responsibility; Freedom; Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion; & Honesty and Trustworthiness” (DEST, 2005). It was through Socratic Circles dialogues that students were able to establish a shared understanding of the values in focus in the learning activities of the MIIC.

This study confirms the challenge to integrate the reform into national and state curriculum frameworks. In particular, from a system perspective, the timing of the introduction of the Values Education was problematic. The introduction of the National Framework for Values Education in Australia coincided with the introduction of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). Although Values Education was implicit in the VELS, this framework of achievement standards prioritised an examination of curriculum design, delivery, assessment and reporting of key learning areas not capabilities. An identification of discrete capabilities, worthy of implementation, was to come later.

In this study the Values Education reform was understood as a framework, not a prescriptive curriculum course of study, “a frame, not a cage” (GS2). Neither the cluster composition of schools nor the program of activities were mandated by the funding authority. As a result, the freedom given to schools to use the framework for the context agreed upon by the collective cluster of schools was embraced by the teachers and students in the MIIC.

Although state and national curriculum frameworks and priorities often take precedence over other educational reforms, it is evident that values education is connected to all aspects of schooling and draws deeply from the enduring and evolving aims of education. Values education “is not a discrete program or part of an implicit hidden curriculum; it is a central principle underpinning the school curriculum offerings, the curriculum design, pedagogy, content and assessment” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 10). Such descriptions resonate with a system perspective of GS2 that “Values is very, very strong in the Melbourne Declaration. Values are very strong in terms of the, the general capabilities of the National Curriculum and I think Values, I can see Values very strongly in the History curriculum”.

A key finding of this research recognises the need for *Curriculum Alignment*, to embed reform into curriculum frameworks and educational standards outcomes to maximise sustainability. As long as the academic learning outcomes of students continue to drive school decision-making, it is critical that connections are made clear to schools to justify the investment of time and resources in projects such as this. For example, the revised Victorian Curriculum (VCAA, 2016) iteration reflects the developments in the area of capabilities that reflect the learning experiences of the MIIC project. Without the explicit links to curriculum frameworks; courses of study; assessment and reporting; and expectations, projects such as the MIIC will not be considered a priority by those within schools who are motivated solely by the academic achievement of students.

## 6.6 Student: Foundational Enacting Elements

Three foundational elements were shown to contribute to Transformational Dialogue in the case of the MIIC. These foundational elements of *Shared Purpose*, *Cultural Literacy* and *Deep Learning* were evidenced at the micro level of the student enacted in the Socratic Circles dialogues in the MIIC.

### 6.6.1 Enacting Element 1: Shared Purpose

*Shared Purpose* acknowledges the importance of an agreed understanding of the purpose of education to inform and form. Where education system policies, school processes and classroom pedagogical practices, such as Socratic Circles, align in purpose, learning is supported to be transformational.

This first enacting element is a shared understanding of the complex purpose and imperative of education to both inform and form the person through communication towards transformation. Respondents shared perspectives on education as a process of informing, forming and transforming individuals and groups in accord with an understanding of what it means to be fully human.

This research suggests that the students understood the aims of education to be multi-faceted, inclusive of an academic imperative to equip learners with the basic knowledge acquisition and skills requisite “to inform and educate” (ST2), for participation in society and for personal achievement and satisfaction “to provide us with the basics that we need to achieve what we want in life” (ST4). The commentary reflects the understanding that part of the complex purpose of education is to promote the acquisition of information to build bodies of knowledge. In national and state curriculum frameworks, bodies of knowledge are discrete domains of learning which are rarely integrated. In this study, the Socratic Circles Pedagogy allowed for the integration of acquiring knowledge and developing capabilities.

An understanding of the purpose of education presented in Chapter 2 referred to Dewey’s belief that education is a fostering, nurturing and cultivating process and the conditions of the educational environment are naturally social and developmental (1916). This thinking aligns with the experience of students who identified education as having a values-based, socialising purpose “to develop someone to be able to integrate into society and be a functioning member...I don’t think the aim of education is to make intelligent people; it’s to make people who will do good things in society” (ST5). The socialising imperative of education is understood and enacted in pedagogy that brings learners into face-to-face contact with each

other. Subverting the traditional linear spaces of classrooms into communicative circles maximises the relational aspects of learning and builds social capacity as evidenced in this study. This research suggests that education plays a role in forming the individual as well as informing the individual, and that Socratic Circles pedagogy fosters pro-social capacity among learners. It is noted that this can only occur when participants are invested and engaged in the process which therefore requires an understanding of the purpose of the learning and activity. This sense of purpose is understood and shared among teachers and students.

Developing an ability to communicate is part of the purpose of an education to “be able to understand dialogue and conversation” (ST5). Communication is the primary mode of transmission in education and within this teaching learning process the disposition of participants is potentially transformed (Dewey, 1916, p. 6). There was consistent alignment in the student responses with understanding that communicative competence is an essential element of the learning process.

Students identified a general knowledge of the world as part of the multidimensional purpose of education “to be able to learn and increase your knowledge about the world and things in general” (ST2), “making everyone aware of the world around them, of what is important, what should be focused on in the world” (ST6). The capacity to engage with the world and issues of global importance suggests an understanding of the potential of education to engender a more open disposition to contemporary issues. In this research, there was an acknowledgement that an education which encompasses engagement with the world, being influenced, and potentially having influence, can lead to transformation of self and others. The students identified the individual benefits of education in addition to the social experience of learning and developing with others.

The foundational element of *Shared Purpose* is enacted by students at the micro classroom level of education. This element is enabled by educators who choose pedagogies such as Socratic Circles which have as an implicit learning intention, to bring learners together in dialogue towards synthesis and community. This study has shown the significant role that members of the school community, including school and project leaders and teachers, who understood the complex aims of education, play in responding to the diverse needs of learners in contemporary society. Leaders and teachers at the meso school level of education in this study, articulate the belief that educators have an obligation to teach critical thinking skills in addition to content knowledge. This is understood as an imperative, “to be able to plan, how to be able to analyse ... how to read and write, but beyond reading and writing” (LT3).

A key finding of the study is that students benefitted from having opportunities to think critically and engage in dialogic structures within the Socratic Circles process which supported critical thinking. This connects with the literature which supports pedagogies which engender critical thinking, developing active habits of mind, “being opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth. Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself” (Dewey, 1916, Part 4, Summary). A “General Capability” of the Australian Curriculum and a “Capability” of the Victorian Curriculum, Critical and Creative Thinking, encompasses “Questions and Possibilities, Reasoning and Meta-Cognition” and supports the development of students to “identify, articulate, analyse and reflect on their own and others’ thinking processes” (VCAA, 2016). An acknowledgement by school leaders and teachers of the potential power of creative pedagogy to develop curiosity and questioning capacity in learners to build knowledge and understanding is understood to connect to the agreed aims of education.

In this study, the integral role of school leaders and teachers in enabling a sense of *Shared Purpose* was highlighted in the use of a common pedagogy that was understood to be relevant to the aims of the learners in the interschool cluster. An understanding of the aims of education encompassed the development of characteristics associated with global citizenship, as noted by LT5 in: “Empowerment, liberation, offering potential for people to be, to live life to the full and to be effective global citizens who can contribute to an enhanced humanity and an enhanced human race and a better future for everybody and everything”. This is consistent with the literature which includes a focus on education as a process of developing within students the realisation of “inherent human powers and capacities” being the growth of freedom (Kant, 2009, p. 141) and is echoed in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989), articulated specifically in Article 29.1, “The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin” (Art. 29.1, [d]). In this research, educators articulated that providing opportunities for young people to learn in culturally diverse contexts prepares them for responsible citizenship. The agreed aspiration to support learners to be able and motivated to make a contribution to “an enhanced humanity” (LT5) behoves school leaders and teachers to consider creating learning environments and opportunities which build diverse communities of learners so that the exercise of freedom can be enacted and evaluated. In this study, the educators involved in the MIIC were shown to commit to pedagogies which were relevant to this aim.

School leaders and teachers saw the connection between values and the notion of good global citizenship: “they (students) are global citizens, not just citizens of our school or not just citizens of their own home or their little community but the broader, wider community and most importantly the world” (LT7). The belief of teachers that students are global citizens led them to provide opportunities for classroom dialogue and activity towards a consideration of “an enhanced humanity” (LT5) and their potentiality for transformation as a consequence of their engagement. This is consistent with a large-scale comparative study (Conner & Greene, 2006) which investigated the role of teachers in preparing students to become better global citizens. The study concluded that teachers thought that the aims of education should include the development of the whole child including life-skills, content knowledge, critical thinking, decision-making and demonstration of positive social values (Conner & Greene, 2006). This research shows that having opportunities to learn and demonstrate positive social values requires the practice of pedagogies which facilitate open, free dialogue wherein student voice and agency is prioritised.

In this research, there is a shared understanding that education aims to inculcate certain values as agreed upon as conducive to a socially cohesive society where “you have to live values. People have to feel that the values are happening in schools” (LT1). Townsend and Otero (1999) in their seminal work predicted the increasingly globalised world of learning, and advocated planning for a curriculum which would promote and encourage the relational aspects of being human. This study identified, through a close reading of the developments in both the Australian and Victorian state curriculum frameworks throughout the decade, a greater emphasis on delivering curriculum which responds to the needs of the learner in a more holistic way. Such a curriculum addresses the relational aspects of being human through the “Personal and Social Capability” which emphasises Social Awareness and Management through the strands of Relationships and diversity; and Collaboration (VCAA, 2016, Scope and Sequence).

In order to promote and encourage the relational aspects of being human, a reflection on the relational characteristics of the learning environment is helpful. Following from an appreciation of classroom as “the potential to be the microcosm of what the world could become” (Hawkes, 2009, p. 120), teacher identity is at the heart of meaningful encounter. In this study, the student peer relationships facilitated by the activities coordinated by the teachers contributed to the enactment of the mission of the participating schools. Teacher identity characteristics integral to mission are identified in one study (Sultmann & Brown, 2019) as “relational agency” (p. 159) enabling the growth of student capabilities; “relational equity” (p.

160) expressed through social justice values of inclusion and respect; and “relational authenticity” (p. 161) witnessing alignment with Catholic school tradition (Sultmann & Brown, 2019). For both the faith-based and secular school participants in this study, there was evidence that the learning in the MIIC aligned with the vision and purpose of the individual schools. The consolidation of the learning that took place in the MIIC with values education in each individual school context added another layer to the element of *Shared Purpose*.

This study has shown the significant role that members of school communities play in inculcating values that aim to build character as well as knowledge and skills for students, as described by LT4: “to maximise their potential, it’s to challenge and take them beyond...not only an academic aim, it is producing a...well-rounded person”. Such an understanding of the purpose of education connects with the literature regarding quality teaching. Lovat & Toomey (2009) characterise the integration of quality teaching and values education which contributes to the development of capacities: intellectual depth; communicative competence; empathic character, capacity for reflection; self-management and self-knowledge (p. xviii).

A key finding of the study is the importance of agreeing to and articulating a *Shared Purpose* that can be genuinely enacted at a student learning level. Among the school and project leaders and teachers there was acknowledgement of school as an inculcator of values recognising that values are imbued as a result of implicit and/or explicit school structures and teacher practices. The aim of the *National Framework of Values for Australian Schooling* (DEST, 2005) was to provide a guide to schools to plan and enact in a systematic way a values education program as a core part of schooling (Curriculum Corporation, 2008). The role of school leaders and teachers in the MIIC enabled the shared purpose of the values education program to be enacted by the student participants.

An acknowledgement of the changing role of schools in teaching values and the expectations that schools will take responsibility for addressing societal issues was evidenced by the data: “We’ve moved from being a body that might reinforce parental and societal values to increasingly the body which actually teaches values”; and further, “Every time an issue arises it’s, ‘Get the schools to do it’, and I suppose that is because we are the only institution where a large number of young people congregate and are a captive audience”(LT4). The importance of strong school and parental partnerships is identified as a distinct school improvement measure in the National School Improvement Tool and supporting evidence (Masters, 2012).

This study reinforces the belief that values are reflected in all endeavours and every intention and activity of schools is values-laden as articulated by LT5 as “values are absolutely



fundamental, intrinsic, embedded in everything we do...constant reference is made to values". This belief aligns with the conclusions drawn by a University Associate Network member, Professor Robert Crotty, during the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project: Stage 2, who noted that,

The cause of values education is essential, in my opinion, to Australian education. It is the ingredient that can make the difference to education in the Australian context. Students who attend a school where they feel secure from physical and psychological harm, who are met by teachers who model ethical behaviours and who require such behaviours from their students will achieve well in the academic sphere. Why? The answer is obvious. Because the students will be more emotionally stable; they will apply themselves to learning with greater alacrity; they will be more at ease with school personnel and will achieve greater self-discipline. (DEEWR, 2008, p. 6)

Element 1 emerged from an analysis of data which shows the necessity of *Shared Purpose*, enacted at the student level through transformational learning experiences which are enabled by appropriate pedagogies reflecting quality teaching.

### **6.6.2 *Enacting Element 2: Cultural Literacy***

*Cultural Literacy* recognises that a contemporary education within the context of a pluralist society requires engagement of learners in educational experiences which utilise pedagogies encompassing culturally-literate practices. Socratic Circles dialogic structure allows for a multiplicity of voices in pursuit of reason and meaning.

To be culturally literate encompasses knowing and understanding one's own and others' cultural dimensions. *Cultural Literacy* is demonstrated through capabilities in relating to those with different cultures to one's own. A recurring insight relates to the identity and the extent to which individuals recognise their citizenship as a local construct or more globally, and the value of engaging more openly and expansively in communities. The relational disposition of respect, recognised as a core value for coexistence in a diverse community, is connected with the educational response of the MIIC. For students involved in the study, cultural literacy developed as part of participation in Socratic Circles in the MIIC. Through the enactment of a set of practices and negotiated meaning-making processes, students were learning about and demonstrating values characteristic of Transformational Dialogue.

Respondents shared perspectives on contemporary education in a pluralist society providing opportunities for personal and social growth and development reflected in a

movement from insular monoculturalism to multiculturalism towards capacity for intercultural understanding and transcultural capability.

In this study, the student participants' description of the aims of the MIIC reflected a deep and developed sense of the purpose of the educational objectives. Students acknowledged the aim of promoting social and intellectual interaction with the intention of addressing stereotypes which act as barriers to genuine understanding and relationship-building. "It was about gaining a greater understanding of different faiths and cultures and sort of breaking down those stereotypes that we all have" said ST1, while ST2 explained that "It was really to break down stereotypes, and to bring people out – we are so sheltered in our own little schools". ST6 reflected that it was "basically, just a better understanding and a greater tolerance of the different faiths...and just creating that awareness".

The aim of the project as articulated in the MIIC application to the Curriculum Corporation, states that the cluster of schools would provide opportunities for young people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds to meet and learn together with a focus on the values of respect, responsibility, freedom, understanding, tolerance and acceptance. There was strong alignment between the learning and demonstration of these values identified by the MIIC as the specific, inter-related values in focus for the project. The element of *Cultural Literacy* was evidenced in the Socratic Circles dialogue and the learning activities which resulted from the dialogue. This element connected with the project aim to provide sustained opportunities for young people from diverse cultural, faith, educational, socio-economic and geographical experiences to interact as evidenced by student commentary on their ability to build relationships based upon values consistent with intercultural capability: "to make us a bit more open-minded to be able to understand and accept other perspectives" (ST4); and that "It was an opportunity for us to be exposed and to integrate with people that we really wouldn't usually integrate with" (ST5).

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, DEST, 2008) identified education as about knowledge and skill acquisition and building character. To support such aims, Lovat and Toomey (2009) described the 'comprehensive educator' as "an inculcator of personal morality and cohesive citizenry" (2009, p. xi). This research shows that in order to achieve the aims of the project, it was critical to establish and maintain communication structures and strategies to coordinate student participation and interaction.

The students identified the opportunities to develop their social capacity in an intercultural setting with a view to moving beyond learning about others to learning with others and learning about themselves throughout the process. This aligned with the literature which identified a cultural challenge met through pedagogy underpinned by dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981) to “bridge the experiential abyss between ourselves and others” (Emerson, 1997, p. 11; Zappen, 2004). In this study, that challenge connected to the reality of school silos even existing within sectors, which is inclined to inhibit the potential to develop cultural literacy and transcultural agency.

The students described a unique kind of engagement with other students that had a focus on contemporary, often controversial issues rather than an exchange about the distinctions between different faiths. Furthermore, there was a clearly articulated sense of the need to nurture cultural literacy as a capability for a socially-cohesive democratic society. This aligns with an understanding of the right of freedom of speech and association as core to a functioning democracy in order to promote ethical values using thinking routines and discussion frames about controversial ideas. This connects with “the free exchange of controversial ideas” (Simpson & Hull, 2011, p. 8), and is understood as a significant feature of learning and demonstrating values in the MIIC project. There is congruence with an authentic enactment of the principles of student voice and agency and the demonstration of values as evidenced in the MIIC activities. In this research, the dialogic pedagogies and inclusive practices of the MIIC constitute an example of voice inclusive practice (VIP), as defined by Sargeant and Gillett-Swan (2015), as “activities and practices that incorporate and actively engage with children and their perspectives on matters that affect them” (p. 181).

More recently, the principles of VIP that enable the participatory rights of the child have been elaborated in relation to four organising principles, “everyday *achievable*, *authentic* and free of burden or guilt, *integral* beyond the pleasure or convenience of the adult and, *compatible* with the rights, responsibilities and citizenship of adults” (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019, p. 127). These interconnected principles provide a framework for educators to reflect on and self-assess their practices in relation to the extent to which their practice recognises each child’s capacity. Accordingly, the child’s perspective is accommodated in planning, decision-making and pedagogy in an authentic way. In this study this was evidenced in the inclusion of a Student Executive decision-making group in the MIIC which provided opportunities for student voice and agency to be expressed and explored. The commentary provided by students in this study, attested to the success of the MIIC in achieving its aims to provide opportunities for interactions

among young people from diverse backgrounds developing cultural literacy. Given that one of the Nine Values for Australian Schooling as outlined in the National Framework for Values Education is “Acceptance, Tolerance and Understanding”, (DEST, 2005) it is important to recognise that unless students are in diverse learning and socialising contexts, they do not have the opportunity to demonstrate fully and authentically, their understanding of and capacity for these values.

Students nominated relationship-building as an outcome of their involvement in the program beyond the formal, funded project stage. Friendships were established and continuous. In this study, students indicated a deeper than surface level of interaction among some participants, as related by ST5: “We still keep in contact with each other so that’s one way of you knowing that it works...we’ve stepped past that prejudice of them being an unknown and now we’re just friends”; and ST3: “I still keep in touch with quite a few people from the interfaith. I see them, actually, really often”. These insights are indicative of the successful achievement of one of the aims of the project to build relationships expanding the notion of community. The depth of relationships evidenced in the MIIC reflects progression from intercultural understanding to transcultural enactment. Student participants identified connections made with other students from other faith and cultural backgrounds during the informal aspects of the MIIC project. For adolescents in particular, the relational aspects of the project were memorable and underscore the importance of designing intercultural learning encounters for young people that include age-appropriate engaging activities.

The New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (Fullan et al., 2018) comprise six global competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking which connect to aspects of learning about values in the MIIC facilitated by Socratic Circles Pedagogy. This research has identified and defended new understandings of the importance of revealing cultural intersections through collaboration and creative expression. From a student perspective, there were opportunities to draw from a Socratic Circles discussion for creative activities including art, music and drama. These activities were understood as an extension of the dialogue. Creativity in the context of the interfaith and intercultural learning experiences of the MIIC is understood to be “dialogue between the ideas and the media in which they are being formed” (Robinson, 2017, p. 131). This is a critical insight and an area which is emerging as an exciting space for educational reform. Where Positive Psychology, incorporating the principles of positive education (Norrish, 2015), foregrounded wellbeing principles and practices being pioneered in schools, there is a current movement to explore what

is meant and realised by creative education (McAloon, 2019). The endeavours of the MIIC were examples of learning activities designed to prompt critical and creative thinking prior to these capabilities being formal strands of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2009).

It was evidenced that several relevant, contemporary social issues were discussed within the structured framework of the Socratic Circles dialogue leading to creative activity and opportunities for social interaction. This research acknowledges this significant impact of the social interaction on student participants. Religious differences, customs, traditions and doctrine were not an emphasis during the MIIC project as it was not an academic exercise in world religions. Instead, there was an emphasis on contemporary issues of cultural relevance to adolescent learners which provided provocation for dialogue.

In the literature, creating connections or bonds between learners moves the learning from thoughts to experience, echoing Dewey's treatise of education and experience (Dewey, 1916) and aligns with an appreciation of deep learning (Fullan et al., 2018). The "Intercultural Capability" as explored in the Victorian Curriculum encourages "dynamic interrelationship between and within cultures" and the critical analysis of "the challenges and benefits of living in an interconnected and culturally diverse world" (VCAA, 2016, Levels 9& 10).

Those students who participated in multiple activities developed friendships, some of which were sustained beyond the formal structured phase of the project. Students reflected upon the impact of their involvement in the project emphasising the relational aspect of their experience and the enduring friendships, "those friendships for me have built into some of the best friendships I have so that's what I think of when I think of interfaith, is my friends really" (ST1). This experience of relationship-building reflects a movement from intercultural knowledge and understanding to a deeper connection, familiarity and community.

The study provides further insight into the relational aspects of the MIIC which supported community among diverse groups of students to encourage social cohesion. The rationale for the inclusion of the "Intercultural Capability" in the Victorian Curriculum includes the assertion that "Intercultural capability enables students to learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. Students learn about diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect" (VCAA, 2016, Rationale and Aims). The experience of student participants in the MIIC is an example of the development of intercultural capability. The research shows that the activities of the MIIC constituted not merely a multicultural exchange of information but an

intercultural dialogic encounter of experiences and ideas with a strong relational base characteristic of Transformational Dialogue.

In this study, school leaders and teachers identified the necessity to provide experiences that reflect the principles of the school, where “you have to live values. People have to feel that the values are happening in schools” (LT1). In this research, educators observed the development of personal and social awareness and management among students who participate in the learning opportunities to reconsider their own identities and grow in their understanding of the cultural identities of others. An insight of the study is the strong congruity between the motivation of each school to engage in intercultural explorations and the curriculum framework modifications around capabilities since the conclusion of the project. The Cultural Diversity strand of the “Intercultural Capability”, supports students to understand the nature of cultural diversity as well as to examine critically the concept of respect, challenges and opportunities created by cultural diversity and the way in which cultural diversity shapes and contributes to social cohesion (VCAA, 2016, Aims). In this study, educators described dimensions of the learning processes of the MIIC, which enabled students to articulate a growing realisation of the similarities between themselves and others who were initially regarded as different.

A significant insight of this study is the critical enabling role that school leaders and teachers play in encouraging learners to move beyond the distinctions in culture which is often characteristic of interfaith intercultural projects towards a deeper understanding of cultural connection. School leaders and teachers identified the clear focus on issues prompting connections between students on a level which transcended differences in culture, rather than focusing on facts about differences in religions and cultures, by simply visiting places of worship and being presented with information about different groups, as noted by LT4, “So even though we visited mosques and we visited Jewish synagogues and temples, having the students mixing with the students from the schools, gave it an extra dimension. It wasn’t just, ‘Isn’t this a nice building’”. (LT4) This reference in LT4’s statement to “an extra dimension” recognises the relational aspect of the MIIC which it was observed, led to participants engaging on a deeper level in their personal and social learning.

This research has identified and defended new understandings of the concept of transcultural capability, the ability to see one’s self and experiences in others, beyond an exchange towards an encounter. This finding resonates with the “Personal and Social Capability” of the Victorian Curriculum (VCAA, 2016) which includes the Social Awareness

and Management strand with a more refined focus on Relationships and Diversity (VCAA, 2016). Accordingly, the Achievement Standards for students in the Middle Years of Secondary schooling, include the capacity to “critique their ability to devise and enact strategies for working in diverse teams, drawing on the skills and contributions of team members to complete complex tasks” (VCAA, 2016, Curriculum Mapping Template: Personal and Social Capability–Levels 9 & 10). Unless learners have opportunities to work and learn in “diverse teams” it is a challenge to demonstrate capacity to enact the Personal and Social Capability, and demonstrate achievement of standards in the Social Awareness and Management strand. When the Socratic Circles Pedagogy is employed as a framework for intellectual and social interaction for diverse groups of learners, students have the potential to demonstrate, in an authentic context, the capacity for social awareness and management. It was shown in this study that as participants engage in dialogue with others they receive and give impactful feedback about ideas, questions, analysis, critique and communication norms. In addition, the social aspect of the learning activities of the MIIC allowed for trust to develop and the element of fun in the creative aspects of the project allowed for informalities and friendships to grow naturally which helped to cultivate *Cultural Literacy*.

Educators provided insight into the shift from multicultural encounters to intercultural understanding and capability towards a deeper, transcultural engagement where students learn from each other and see themselves in each other forming relationships—an example of experiential learning. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006) makes the distinction between multicultural education and intercultural education. It is in the latter that the enduring aims of education can be fully realized.

An acknowledgement of the integral role of the teacher in the achievement of the cultural aims of the MIIC supports learning activities and pedagogies which enable an exploration of the learning challenges and potentialities of cultural intersections. Eeqbal Hassim asserts that intercultural learning “is so much more than learning about ‘other’ cultures...Intercultural learning is learning what is relevant: it recognises the intercultural nature of our world; it enables learners to develop competencies to deal constructively with our intercultural world” (2018, Handout slide, “Changing the premise”). In this study, it was evidenced that the learning of the MIIC gave expression to the relevant shift to intercultural education and echoes Dewey’s extrapolation of the notion of experiential learning. For adolescents who are especially inclined to disengagement, Dewey’s advocacy of quality

educational experiences endures and is particularly pertinent to this study as it relates to the enjoyable nature of engaging in experiential learning. Consistent with the literature, the social dimension of the regular gatherings bringing together students from the five culturally-diverse Cluster schools was a motivational factor in students' participation and was shown to be critical to learning about and demonstrating core values in an adolescent context.

From a school leader and teacher perspective, this research suggests that any Values Education program that may seek to prescribe one group's set of values as superior to another is counter-intuitive and ultimately untenable, as asserted by LT3: "If it's done to impose one set of values on everybody, then I don't see the point of that...it needs to respect and reflect the way everyone thinks".

The study found that staff and student participation in the MIIC project cultivated social cohesion, developing a more genuine respect and understanding of the other, pertaining to both the differences and similarities. At a system and school leadership level, the value of respect is demonstrated by empowering teachers and students to express their cultural views, understandings and experiences in a supportive learning environment. The study asserts that the nature of the learning as evidenced in the MIIC project is of increasing national priority in relation to social cohesion in schools and the broader community.

Schools play an important role in facilitating social cohesion within their own often diverse communities, and in being outward-focused, seeking opportunities for experiences of wider community-building. From a school perspective, the opportunity to situate the MIIC experience in a global context, providing students with platforms to share their learning experiences and connect with other teachers and students reinforced the significance of the cultural exchange and the developing cultural literacy among the participants.

It was shown that the experience of presenting learning from the MIIC project at the Parliament of the World Religions, provided staff and students with opportunities to showcase their learning. Seeing the learning situated in an international context of conflict resolution and social cohesion provided a more vivid sense of purpose, meaning and validation to the learning of the MIIC. A key finding of the study is that teachers and learners benefitted from sharing their learning with others in a diverse range of cultural contexts for a variety of audiences.

This study has shown the significant role that members of the school community play in enabling the conditions for cultural literacy to be developed among learners. Leaders and teachers in this study assert that social cohesion was a by-product of interactions involving groups from disparate faith and cultural contexts through the dialogues and activities of the



MIIC. It was evidenced that student participants had numerous opportunities at gatherings of the MIIC project to connect with others and this resulted in a deeper understanding of the other, as to both similarities and differences.

In this study, some participants at the school level reported that as a largely monocultural school in a monocultural suburb, the experience of the MIIC project, with a composition of diverse faith and cultural groups of adolescents, was significant. The composition of the Cluster was shown to add a unique and powerful dimension to the interactions and discussions. A key finding of the study is that for student participants, the project gave expression to the value of free expression including open discussion, understanding different viewpoints and building relationships.

School leaders and teachers identified a notable shift from monocultural to multicultural to intercultural to transcultural as an identifiable outcome of the MIIC project reflecting developing *Cultural Literacy*. In this research, educators articulated that the MIIC project worked to counter separateness and combat ignorance that can be the natural consequence of little or no interaction with others from different cultural groups. The literature reflects trends in global education encouraging open-mindedness about the challenges of contemporary society and equity of participation. It promotes responsible behaviours with respect and diversity being core values for active citizenship (Education Services Australia, 2008). In the responses of the educators in this study, it was evidenced that the learning of the MIIC allowed the enactment of these pro-social behaviours for active citizenship. This was found to be of particular importance for those students for whom the reality of socialising was within largely monocultural communities, being characterised as living in a ‘bubble’, or moving from one cultural bubble to the next. This study shows the impact of an experience of diversity which the project provided for participants.

The research indicates that the MIIC project allowed teachers to reflect on the impact of the development of ideas and values in students leading to growing *Cultural Literacy*. Teachers observed learning outside of the classroom on multiple occasions. In bringing a diverse group of adolescents together, teachers noted the Socratic Circles discussion framework providing a scaffold for open dialogue and relationship-building to advance understanding and provide a model of authentic community in a pluralist society. School leaders and teachers observed this learning for students as important, and for themselves as educators, a “magic moment in education” because of the impact the intercultural interactions had on the students reflecting learning that was transformational.

This research identifies that educational responses to growing diversity, such as the learning in the MIIC, support the development of cultural literacy which contributes to a socially cohesive society (DEEWR, 2010). “Certainly”, says GS6, “with the interfaith work that understanding, sharing of experiences and understanding of others leads to cohesion, and although Australia is apparently a very socially cohesive country, that’s easily fractured...if you look at Sydney with the riots”. This reference to racially charged violence in December 2005 (Poynting, 2006) resonates with the motivation for the work of the MIIC, and the relevance of the aims and learning of the project endure as racially motivated violence continues to be a reality.

### **6.6.3 Enacting Element 3: Deep Learning**

*Deep Learning* identifies the effectiveness of dialogic pedagogies, such as Socratic Circles, to scaffold communicative competence, promote intellectual depth and develop interpersonal capability which are imperatives of contemporary curriculum.

In an exploration of the potentialities of pedagogical choices to transform educational outcomes for learners, deep learning is defined as “valuable learning that sticks” (Fullan et al., 2018, p. xvii). Deep learning as expounded by Fullan et al. (2018) features characteristics explored in the learning experiences by student participants, as it “increases self and others’ expectations for more learning and achievement by providing a process; builds skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and self-efficacy through inquiry” (p. 9). Socratic Circles Pedagogy has the potential to provide the kind of process Fullan et al. describe as “deep learning”.

Respondents shared perspectives on the learning experiences of the MIIC providing insight into the deep learning which resulted from participation in the Socratic Circles process. *Deep Learning* was fostered by the scaffolded activities of critical reading of many and varied texts; sustained dialogue and observation of peers in dialogue; participation in growth-focused feedback; and creative expression connecting with the ideas raised in the dialogue and sharing the learning with the broader community.

This study has shown that it is possible to use a teaching and learning pedagogical strategy that promotes sound educational outcomes and builds communicative competence at the same time. The study emphasised that Socratic Circles as a method is as much a vehicle for content delivery as it is a mechanism for building communication and social capacity. The following reflections capture the impact of this dialogic approach to learning about values

enabling the demonstration of those values: “It was successful in the way that it brought people together, I think, and opened discussion” (ST3); and “You’re considering the information and then pointing out the important part so you’re not time-wasting, particularly. Yeah, so you’ve got that structure” (ST6).

It is apparent that the Socratic Circles structure with a built-in feedback element engenders self-awareness and patience as students learn to be more respectful and tolerant. The success criteria as articulated in the Socratic Circles Rubric (Appendix B) was used in an informal way during this project. It includes a criterion related to listening skills (Copeland, 2005). Cultivating listening skills complements the “Personal and Social Capability” curriculum as outlined in the Victorian Curriculum (VCAA, 2016, Introduction), particularly in relation to the development of self-awareness and management.

The purpose and effectiveness of the Critical Reading stage as part of the Socratic Circles methodology contributed to *Deep Learning* by providing extended reading time for the preparation of reference notes for forthcoming dialogues. Student respondents referred to the stimulus material, chosen at times by teachers and at other times by students, which acted as engaging provocations for the dialogues. The material selected by both teachers and students was provided to students at least a week prior to the Socratic Circles discussion. Students had preparation time to read the prompts for discussion critically and annotate the text/s with comments and further questions in preparation for their contributions to the forthcoming discussion. This process of critical reading was scaffolded by teachers with a pedagogical focus on the levels of reading for literal, inferential and evaluative meaning. Students expressed their view of the benefits of this stage in the Socratic Circles process, including the opportunity to have time to think critically, prepare responses and then, during the open forum, to express opinions freely. ST5 commented: “It’s interesting that it’s, you get a question, and we all had readings that we could do, just writing those questions, but it was open to discuss anything that you wanted to discuss”. The sentiment expressed in this comment by ST5 and echoed in other responses makes evident that the student participants valued the freedom to control the content and direction of the dialogues afforded to them by the structure of the Socratic Circles.

As articulated in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989), children are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but are active in their own learning. They are to be “encouraged and permitted to express their views, appreciate the freedom to think for themselves and respect the views of others” (Commission on Human Rights, 2004, para. 117). Such learning deepens personal identity and agency, manifests freedom of thought, and

contributes to respectful relationships with peers. In this study, the learning process of Socratic Circles were shown to cultivate active and *Deep Learning*.

In this study, students identified the exposure to a wide variety of texts, in contrast to the more restricted choice of texts in their mainstream classes. This was viewed as contributing to the depth of the Socratic Circles learning process. This research identifies the potential of the Socratic Circles pedagogy to develop skills in synthesising ideas from a range of texts and viewpoints. The persuasive writing and analysis tasks of national and state standardised testing reflect that persuasive skills are privileged in education and educators can use pedagogies which support learning and skill development in this high-stakes focus curriculum area (ACARA, 2018; VCAA, 2018). Furthermore, the capacity to be persuasive rather than coercive is advantageous in team problem-solving and represents a valuable transferable skill.

In this study, schools found distinctive ways to connect the *Deep Learning* experiences of the project with their school's tradition and culture and were able to appreciate another dimension of relevance whether in connection to the ethos and spiritual tradition of their school or in relation to a pastoral care program. School leaders and teachers identified the opportunities for professional collaboration with other colleagues, enabling values education to be integrated in various school pursuits and considered to be "integral to all aspects of school life" and seen as part of a "whole school approach and commitment" (DEEWR, 2008, p. 15).

The double helix metaphor used to characterise the interwoven links of quality teaching and values education (Lovat & Toomey, 2009) was shown to have resonance in this research. Quality teaching cultivates a learning environment wherein learners flourish, growing in capacity for: intellectual depth, communicative competence, empathic character, capacity for reflection, self-management, and self-knowledge (Lovat & Toomey, 2009, p. xviii). This study recognises that the what, or content, of the dialogue is as critical as the how, or communication, of the dialogue, as perceived by LT5, "It's a part of the conversation, and that you engage, and you show respect for other ideas and other views and other perspectives". The clear expectations, learning intentions and success criteria of the Socratic Circles process provides the structure and supports for student growth.

This research has shown the potential of a structured, dialogic pedagogical strategy to promote academic outcomes while building communicative and interpersonal competence. The research emphasised that Socratic Circles is a pedagogical method for content delivery as well as a mechanism for building communication and social capacity.

This study showed that student participants understood the rationale behind the choice of Socratic Circles as the framework for discussion. The self-regulatory effect upon behaviour that the Socratic Circles structure engendered was identified in this study. The immediacy of peer feedback encouraged more measured and analytical thinking and more respectful interaction synonymous with deep learning.

The benefits of deep learning articulated by Fullan, Quinn and McEachen (2018) include: engagement of students in the learning through personalization and ownership; connection of students to the 'real world', which is often more reflective of their own reality and cultural identity, which can be particularly important for students from other cultures; resonance with spiritual values that link to vast numbers of the population whether secular or religious; and building of new relationships with and between the learner, their family, their communities, and their teachers (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 9). These characteristics of *Deep Learning* were evident in this research, attributed to the learning experiences of the MIIC.

For transformative learning to take place as part of an education in values, it is critical that encounters are characterised by respect for others' perspectives and opinions. This in turn promotes social cohesion. The final report (Bereznicki, Brown, Toomey, & Weston, 2008) of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project—Stage 2 of the implementation of the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (DEST, 2003), explores how values education can connect more specifically with fostering social inclusion and intercultural understanding. The learning experiences of the MIIC is acknowledged as providing an exemplar of secondary students clarifying and discerning their values and the values of others in a respectful and reasonable way. It is an effective pedagogy for use with students in the middle years who are exploring interfaith and intercultural issues through a values lens (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 29).

The report conducted by University Association Network advisors (Chapman, Aspin, & Staples, 2008) to the Values Education program articulated the appropriateness of the pedagogical choice of Socratic Circles as methodology for dialoguing about contentious issues. This research asserts that Socratic Circles pedagogy can provide a safe space for conflict, surfacing assumptions, perspectives and prejudices for exploration and examination in a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

The use of Socratic Circles required a transformation of the physical space of the classroom. Instead of students focused on the teacher at the front of the classroom sitting in linear formation, students sat in concentric circles—the inner circle engaged in conversation,

while the outer circle was engaged in close observation. This re-organisation of the physical space of the classroom promoted self-awareness and management as well as respect for others and their point of view. The Socratic Circles discussion framework promotes more equitable participation than the more traditional form of classroom discussion which prioritises the lecture-style instruction format.

The study confirmed that the choice by the MIIC to use Socratic Circles was appropriate in integrating values in discussions about cultural identity and social issues. Characteristic of Socratic Circles is the objectification of conflict and thus the ability of students to consider highly controversial issues within the safety of the structure of the circle discussion.

Individual schools which were part of the initial Cluster of schools in the MIIC were still able to maintain aspects of the learning experience of the project if they re-envisaged aspects of the program which did not rely on external funding. The study also found that aligning the Values Education project with other compatible educational initiatives such as restorative practices was an effective way of sustaining beneficial aspects of the project. The study showed that there may be opposition to a program that takes senior students out of timetabled classes; that unless teaching staff can see the benefit of the program in an academic sense, there may be tension regarding the benefit of their students' involvement.

The study has illuminated the transferability of Socratic Circles as a pedagogical tool across year levels of schooling and across curriculum areas. The benefit of high-quality professional development about the teaching strategy was underscored by this study.

The study proposes that students require continuous support and scaffolding in the method of Socratic Circles for refinement such that students could fully engage with the discussion task. Although the study found that students behave and learn more autonomously in the Socratic Circles process compared with the lecture-style instruction of traditional classrooms, this did not mean that students relied less on teacher facilitation, guidance and feedback. Importantly, the use of Socratic Circles provided a complementary pedagogical approach to the teaching of values. The discussion methodology was appropriately challenging and constituted a rich task encouraging participation in formal intellectual conversation while concurrently engaged in respectful social interaction.

From a school perspective, Socratic Circles provided a complementary pedagogical approach to the teaching of values by virtue of the interactional nature of the method which, as described by LT1, is "to use something like Socratic Circles where people are not necessarily being taught the values, but...learn the values through interaction". There is potential to

leverage pedagogical encounters to support intellectual and emotional, ethical and democratic growth and create “dialogical cultures that facilitate considered or educative discussions” (Simpson & Hull, 2011, p. 18).

This research has identified the effectiveness of the Socratic Circles methodology to contribute to the pro-social capacity of adolescents as they learn about and demonstrate those values which correspond with democratic principles. As reflected by LT1, “I noticed that is something that our students benefitted from...it gives them an opportunity to listen to others, what they say, and have an opportunity to respond later in a very organised discourse”.

The potential is advanced for Socratic Circles encounters to provide a powerful counterpoint to the virtual worlds of shallow, anonymous communication characteristic of some experiences of the online social network culture. Face-to-face dialogue contrasts with the screen-dependent modes of communication. Adolescents today do not necessarily communicate any less than other generations of adolescents did, but the exponential growth in digital technologies providing online communication platforms means less face-to-face communication than ever before. The formal discussion method of the Socratic Circles provides a unique experience to practise skills in oral communication and socialisation.

From a school perspective, active listening was noted as a worthy social skill to develop in adolescents through Socratic Circles. Students had an opportunity to listen and then speak as various viewpoints were expressed in a safe and respectful environment created by both the teachers and the students involved. This observation aligns with the notion of education for the development of all dimensions of the person, a more holistic approach incorporating deepening the capacity of the person to educate the inner self (Hawkes, 2009, p. 110).

Socratic Circles comprise creative and critical elements for collaborative thinking and truth-searching. This research identifies Socratic Circles as a pedagogical approach which creates the conditions for a “joint communicative activity with the goal of discovering truth” (Amir, 2001, p. 239), which is supported by LT5’s view that “It’s a part of conversation, and that you engage, and you show respect for other ideas and other views and other perspectives”, in reaching some sort of sense of where the truth lies.

This pedagogical approach was situated within the broader context of the National Framework for Values Education, acknowledged as giving impetus to schools to work in clusters and reflect on the nature of learning about values in their own communities. At a school level, the Framework provided structure and support to develop new programs and enhance existing programs.

This research asserts that the choice of effective transferable pedagogies allows for values education to be integrated into many and varied aspects of learning in schools. It is the pedagogy itself that can be a vehicle for values education, allowing it to be “grasped by teachers, schools and systems as being central and pivotal to their endeavours, rather than being on the margins...values education has the potential to go to the very heart of what it is that teachers, schools and educational systems are about” (Curriculum Corporation, 2008, p. 23).

Reinforcement of courteous behaviour and speech, turn-taking, active listening, constructive and considered criticism and positive reinforcement, all align with the expectations of school policies on behaviour and conduct. The Socratic Circles Rubric (Appendix B) which tables the success criteria for the Socratic Circles includes descriptors for outstanding communication including, “Comments indicate very accurate and perceptive listening; Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm. Works to support all participants at all times; Accepts points of view other than own and uses them to expand ideas and discover new meaning” (Copeland, 2005, p. 132). Importantly, these attributes can be described, observed and measured.

In this study it was understood that for sustainability of educational reform of this type, it needed to synchronise with established programs and practice, reflected in SL2’s view, “I think Restorative Practices at the College are rich in values too. If you have a look at the values for Australian schooling and so on and so forth, it’s all about restorative practices, all of it”. This research indicates that at a school level the Socratic Circles Pedagogy was able to be transferred across curriculum areas and year levels. This research identifies the transferability of Socratic Circles as school Values Education Coordinators from each of the Cluster schools applied the professional learning to their respective schools. In this study teachers were able to use the discussion techniques across various subjects and the quality of discussion and involvement lifted significantly.

In *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2012), Hattie outlines a set of mind frames that have powerful impacts on learning. Included in the set is “Mind Frame 5: Teachers/Leaders engage in dialogue not monologue” listening to students learning, and balancing talking and listening (p. 186). Socratic pedagogies support the development of this mind frame towards a balance between talking and listening. At a school level, the professional learning and development for the teachers involved in the MIIC had a flow-on effect in the participating schools with the use of the discussion strategy by teachers who were not directly involved in the project itself. This research shows that the coordinating teachers at the Cluster schools were able to model and



instruct other staff in using Socratic Circles and who scaffolded the introduction of the pedagogy at their respective schools.

The explicit teaching of values across curriculum areas was possible and preferable in implementing the reform. At a school level, progressions of learning in curriculum areas such as English and the Humanities provided opportunities to integrate or reference values. Research into dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2017) attests to the powerful impact that dialogic pedagogies have on learning. Dialogic teaching manifests in students asking more questions than teachers, collaborative learning, exploring ideas and building upon ideas through inquiry and dialogue, all characteristic of deep learning.

This research indicates that the exhibition of the collective artworks created by students during the activities of the MIIC in four public exhibition spaces was a validation of student learning and creativity and had a personal impact on participants. “They were able to see the works so they felt good about it and came back and told the students,” said LT1. Teaching for creativity (Robinson, 2017, p. 227) facilitates the learners’ creative imagination and work. Teachers employ open-ended questions, co-inquiring and exploring possible solutions to problems and scaffold learners to make connections between different perspectives.

In this research, students articulated the specific values they demonstrated during their involvement in the MIIC. The learning moved from the theoretical to the enacted and when asked to elaborate on the dispositions and values demonstrated, students nominated acceptance, tolerance, respect and understanding. These were four of the values of the *National Framework of Values for Australian Schooling* (2005) which were chosen as the values in focus for learning in the MIIC and recognised as elements of the learning experiences by student participants. A range of comments reveal this recognition: “I’d like to think that I was accepting before, but it definitely opens up your horizons and makes you realise that everyone is—teenagers are all pretty similar” (ST3); “Tolerance, definitely. Teamwork and cooperating with different people and communication skills, definitely” (ST4); “Well, we were breaking down those stereotypes” (ST6); “I think understanding and acceptance” (ST2).

## **6.7 Achieving the Aims of Education through Transformational Dialogue**

Transformational Dialogue is predicated upon values of respect and openness. The Socratic Circles pedagogical approach is complementary to the teaching of values by virtue of the interactional nature of the method. The method lends potential to leveraging pedagogical encounters to support intellectual and emotional, ethical and democratic growth and create

cultures of dialogue in learning communities. Such communities develop the pro-social capacity of adolescents as they learn about and demonstrate those values which correspond with democratic principles.

The aims of education are understood by those working at a system level, including government and non-government managers and project officers, as encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes to engage with the world. “Education for younger people is about maturing into adulthood, and about acquiring the skills... the attitude, knowledge and skills to manage in the world of the adult” was how GS5 described it. Education, a right of every child, is a skill-centred process which is development and growth-focused and this is borne out in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989).

According to those participants leading and working at an educational system level, education seeks to provide individuals with the requisite skills for the workplace; there is an economic imperative to the purpose of education. GS4 remarks that “a strong foundation will allow them (the students) to move into a whole range of different professions and ways of being in the world, which they otherwise might not have without education”.

The imperative for educators to respond to the challenges of learners today is made more difficult as “the current generation has a hard time imagining the pathway to a desirable future” (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 3). This reality for younger generations behoves educators and the system which supports them to help create real pathways of learning to achieve personal development and experience success. The development of the skill of problem-solving is enabled through dialogic pedagogies which constitute safe spaces for conflicting views and voices. Students use processes to de-polarise issues and work collaboratively to resolve conflicts.

Education is understood as having a role in creating lifelong learners: “It’s to ensure young people are engaged in a kind of lifelong learning pathway, that they get good foundational experiences with education, so that they become active participants in the ongoing process” (GS1). These connected understandings support the development of a capacity for lifelong learning and an appreciation of the potentiality of education as more than simply transactional but also transformational and impactful beyond the formal years and experience of schooling.

The measure of the value of school education according to Dewey is the extent to which it creates in learners the desire for continued growth and the means to enable that growth (1916). Where the term, progress, denotes achievement along linear continua, the word, growth, conjures an understanding of learning as expansive and deep. The embedding of the General

Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010), and the Capabilities in the Victorian Curriculum iteration of this framework (VCAA, 2016), recognises education of the whole person and dimensions of self; it positions the development of the agency of the whole person as central to the aims of education.

Drawing on the work of Freire (2000), Fullan et al. position the learner as one “who acts upon the world (usually with others), thereby transforming her – or himself and the world itself” (2018, p. xvii). The social and emotional dimensions of the person are developed through education. As noted by GS3; “Unless that is in place, I don’t think any other kind of learning can happen”, the social and emotional dimensions of the learner develop in relation to “Self-Awareness and Management” and “Social Awareness and Management” (VCAA, 2016).

This study confirms that for educational reform to be genuinely adopted there needs to be an alignment between the mission and vision of the educational institution and the method upon which the mission is realised. Without resonance with the core policy and strategic documents of the educational institution, it is unlikely that any reform will have sustainability beyond the funding phase of the project. Without a systematic communicative pedagogical strategy, sustainable change is even less likely. Socratic Circles Pedagogy enables the development of communicative competence including self-awareness and self-management as well as awareness of others and management of self in relation to others.

## **6.8 Time**

Underrepresented in the research on working with children and young people is the effect of time. Among the student participants in this study there was a sense that sustained participation in the MIIC project provided opportunities to develop communicative competence, social confidence and skills. However, students asserted that for those who only attended one or few gatherings, the opportunities to establish on-going and meaningful friendships was limited. This research identifies that the funding provided through the project allowed time for schools within clusters to develop the ideas of Values Education into practice for system sharing.

One student felt that the feedback circle did not work as well as it might have, because some students were reluctant to be entirely honest with their critique of inner circle participants. The assertion is made that the theory of the purpose of the outer circle did not always translate into practice with an observation that at times individuals do not feel comfortable to critique someone they are not familiar with and people are inclined towards over-politeness: “no-one

likes to seem like the bad person or the bully ...sometimes the people who did feel confident enough to critique someone, it was their friend or someone, they could explain it to, that they felt they could explain it to in a way that wouldn't leave anyone hurt" (ST2, 2013).

However, this student also added that the later Socratic Circles which took place were much more flowing, natural conversations which in her opinion reflected the established relationships which had built up over an 18-month period. Students became increasingly familiar with the Socratic Circles discussion framework. Illustrative of the change and growth over this period are the comments by the same student who had asserted that the feedback comments were always positive and as students became more comfortable and familiar with each other, they were more likely to offer their opinions and to critique other opinions: "People made some very serious points and other people were able to consider it. I think we did really consider each other's opinion a lot more but we knew where they were coming from" (ST2, 2013). Building relationships was a by-product of Socratic Circles dialogue and the quality of some Socratic Circles was a by-product of the trust which had been built in those relationships: "it took us 18 months to get to that stage, and again, that's with the leadership group, you know, who have been with each other" (ST2, 2013).

Socratic Circles Pedagogy is considered to be an approach that allows for content delivery and the building of communicative capacity. The Critical Reading stage of the Socratic Circles process provides students with time to digest and distil the texts which act as provocations for the dialogue. Supporting materials provided to assist in the preparation and annotation of stimulus material guide learners to prepare questions and comments to maximise the intellectual depth of the discussion. Having preparation time maximises the likelihood of equitable participation in the Socratic dialogue.

Building genuine relationships was supported by the longevity of the project and nature of the interaction. Student participants were able to identify clearly the values in focus for the project and the process undertaken to articulate and demonstrate these throughout the project. There was agreement among the student participants that the aims of the MIIC were achieved for those who were members of the Student Executive of the MIIC who participated in the activities of the group over a sustained period of time.

The Critical Reading stage of the Socratic Circles process was crucial to the quality of understanding, analysis and thinking around the key issues for discussion. The importance of having 'think time' is underscored. Students valued the opportunity to carefully consider the stimulus text and prepare their contribution for discussion and critique. The inclusion of the

Critical Reading stage as part of the SCP process allowing for participants to prepare for the discussion provided valuable thinking time. Students were able to research issues for discussion and familiarise themselves with texts for analysis. The Critical Reading stage allowed for the distillation of information and supported better quality discussion in the MIIC project.

The inner circle provided participants opportunities to articulate their understanding of issues as they related to the values in focus. The inner circle dialogue followed critical reading phases that enabled critical thinking and preparation of commentary and questions for the forthcoming Socratic Circle. In this study, students described the benefit of “think time” in allowing deeper reflection.

Socratic Circles were considered a more realistic style of discussion compared to traditional classroom discussion discourse. In more traditional contexts teachers predominantly decide the content and direct the course of the conversation following a question, answer, elaboration format. In contrast, during a Socratic Circles dialogue, participants have more responsibility for the content and communication. The teacher is not directly involved in the dialogue but evaluates the learning and provides detailed and targeted feedback post-dialogue. Students are encouraged to ask and answer each other’s questions in a much less predictable manner than in traditional classroom discussion.

It is understood that Socratic Circles is a pedagogical tool that promotes formal conversation skills. Given the pervasive use of informal sound bites as the mainstay of communication in social networking, the use of Socratic Circles in adolescent classrooms provides a counterpoint to an instant and oftentimes superficial anonymous communication culture. Time is a resource for critical thinking as it provides the space for reflection and synthesis of ideas.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

This research highlights the potential of Socratic Circles Pedagogy to align with contemporary understandings of transformational *Deep Learning*. As an integrated, differentiated pedagogy which can be applied across learning areas, Socratic Circles serve the dual purpose of education to inform and form. In an intercultural context of globalisation and active citizenship, this dialogic pedagogy provides a learning exemplar for *Creative Education*.

The Socratic Circles structure represents a practical application of the Lundy (2007) model of child participation where participant children are offered Space, Voice, Audience: and Influence (2007, p. 933). The comparison between Socratic Circles dialogue and a more

traditional classroom discussion format is explored by a student participant reflecting the features of space, voice, audience and influence evident in Socratic Circles dialogue: “There’s a lot more freedom. Within other discussion types they’re labelled a ‘discussion’, but they’re not really” (ST5).

Furthermore, the distinction is made between classroom discourses that resemble more traditional classroom environments being teacher-centred where students are passive. The teacher controls the manner, content, purpose and direction of the discourse. The discourse follows the traditional format of initiation-response-feedback with the teacher dominating the classroom talk (Barnes, 1969; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur & Prendergast, 1997). By contrast, the Socratic Circles structure of discussion evolves naturally and is directed by the participants (Copeland, 2005).

Values Education relates to the purpose of education to educate the whole person, developing both the learning and social capacity of the person to function and contribute to society. Additionally, the study suggests that Socratic Circles as a rich pedagogy promotes communicative competence. As a teaching and learning strategy, Socratic Circles support democracy in the classroom by allowing for genuine student agency and voice. This study confirms that Socratic Circles Pedagogy is an example of student-centred learning and dependent upon teacher scaffolds and facilitation. Furthermore, adolescent learners can benefit from education about values that engenders cultural cohesion in a pluralist society within a global, transcultural context.

Student participants had a deep and developed sense of the aims of the MIIC and were positively disposed to participating in the project. Students understood that the MIIC sought to develop a greater understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds. The study showed that the aspirations of the teacher participants to promote social and intellectual interaction with the intention of confronting stereotypes and ignorance aligned strongly with the intentions of the students involved.

In the final chapter, the conclusions of the research are informed by the eight integrative elements which combine to comprise the conceptual framework of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework (Figure 6.1) for effective, sustainable educational reform in relation to the use of Socratic Circles pedagogy in the teaching, learning and demonstration of values in adolescent learning contexts. One of the key conclusions of this study is that this conceptual framework has relevance beyond this MIIC case with potential use in a diverse range of learning contexts where the content relates to any selected sociocultural theme with an aim

of Transformational Dialogue. As well as providing a pedagogical architecture for Transformational Dialogue and being applicable to various contemporary sociocultural themes, Socratic Circles Pedagogy is a viable alternative to traditional didactics. Socratic Circles Pedagogy is valued at a systemic, school and student level as a process for the development of knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions of learners. Socratic Circles Pedagogy is complementary to other pedagogies and can be used to initiate or consolidate learning.

## Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Young people have a unique role to play in bridging the divide between cultural groups, transcending the historical differences which have separated groups (UNICEF, 2001). This research has shown that educators can choose pedagogies that provide an architecture for critical thinking, relationship-building, and communicative competence leading to critique, creativity and social cohesion.

This research has explored the efficacy of Socratic Circles Pedagogy within the context of an Australian National Values Education initiative designed for adolescent learners within an intercultural and interfaith setting. Three groups of participant stakeholders, operating at the micro, meso and macro levels of the Melbourne Interfaith Intercultural Cluster (MIIC), contributed to the study. The MIIC constituted a single case study with data drawn from sequenced, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, processed through Constant Comparative Analysis. As an innovative approach to the teaching, learning and demonstration of values, the Socratic Circles Pedagogy was shown to support the development of cultural understanding and social cohesion in adolescent learners.

The MIIC project brought together educators and young people from five Melbourne secondary schools to create a diverse community of learners. The choice of Socratic Circles Pedagogy in providing a relevant process for dialogue—a safe learning space for agreement and dissent, was confirmed. The project was established through an agreed set of aims related to values education, supported and resourced by federal and state education systems and the three sectors of schooling: Government, Independent and Catholic. Relationships were at the creative core of the learning of the MIIC, led by committed educational leaders and teachers, and inspired by open-minded, curious and optimistic young people.

The findings and conclusions of this research advance an understanding and application of values education. They offer the researcher, colleagues, schools and system leaders a framework for enhancing values education and other sociocultural areas of significance as “something already known to be important” (Sultmann, 2005) whilst cultivating interdependence and quality relationships in its development, delivery and evaluation. This chapter presents the key conclusions and recommendations for the continuing application of Socratic Circles Pedagogy for sociocultural engagement and learning in educational settings.



## **7.1 A Pedagogy of Substance**

Pedagogical approaches vary in both application and success in contemporary schooling. As such, it is imperative that approaches such as Socratic Circles Pedagogy which facilitate deep learning are valued and supported by educational stakeholders. The impact of such an approach in a pluralist school community is largely dependent on an alignment of purpose across the interdependent micro, meso and macro levels of engagement. Achieving the enduring and evolving aims of education, an articulation of values and a recognition of the contributions of stakeholders at each level of the educational experience, requires a positive and strategic structural frame to maximise potential for Transformational Dialogue as understood in the context of this research. This study has revealed through the perspectives of system policy-makers, school leaders and teachers and students, an elemental pathway to Transformational Dialogue within a strategic implementation of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy. The eight elements, as described previously, are both independent and indivisible within the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework (Figure 7.1). These elements are representative of the overall aims of the learning experience, the leadership and teaching experience, and the policy and governance of reform experience.

## **7.2 Beyond the Research Question**

This study examined what three stakeholder groups understand education and more specifically values education to be, and how the Socratic Circles Pedagogy (SCP) influences the teaching, learning and demonstration of values relevant to democratic citizenship. The evidence amassed in this study overwhelmingly supports the SCP approach to values education. However, in answering the central question: To what extent are Socratic Circles an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of values for adolescents?, a broader discussion of the sociocultural context and the achievement of Transformational Dialogue has emerged. As such, throughout this study, the participants have revealed additional outcomes beyond the focus on strategy selection.

This study has shown that not only does SCP engage participants, but that the engagement through this structured dialogue, is transformational. Within the context of this study, Transformational Dialogue achieved through SCP is a process as well as an outcome. It is both the intellectual learning activity and the relational encounter that brings the learner to deeper understanding of self and others. The structural features of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework provide the process to draw together divergent ideas or experiences, and balancing tensions in a safe space, through respect and seeking truth and connection. In this

context, Transformational Dialogue moves the learning experience from the theoretical to the enacted as the values of acceptance, tolerance, respect and understanding are demonstrated through dialogic practices.

### **7.3 Key Insights**

Key insights emerge and present as enduring influences for learning, development of self and community connection. Dialogue was the appropriate mediator for “the development of thinking, the formation of individual identity and the construction of different communities of practice” (Renshaw, 2004, p. 1). Five key insights about the use of SCP were established and reflect the relevance of the approach in relation to structured pedagogy: applicability to other learning contexts; an alternative to traditional classroom didactic discourse; the value of the pedagogy; and, the complementarity of Socratic Circles with other pedagogies. As well, there was evidence of a dynamic interplay between the purpose of the MIIC, the content related to specific values and contemporary issues, and innovative pedagogy.

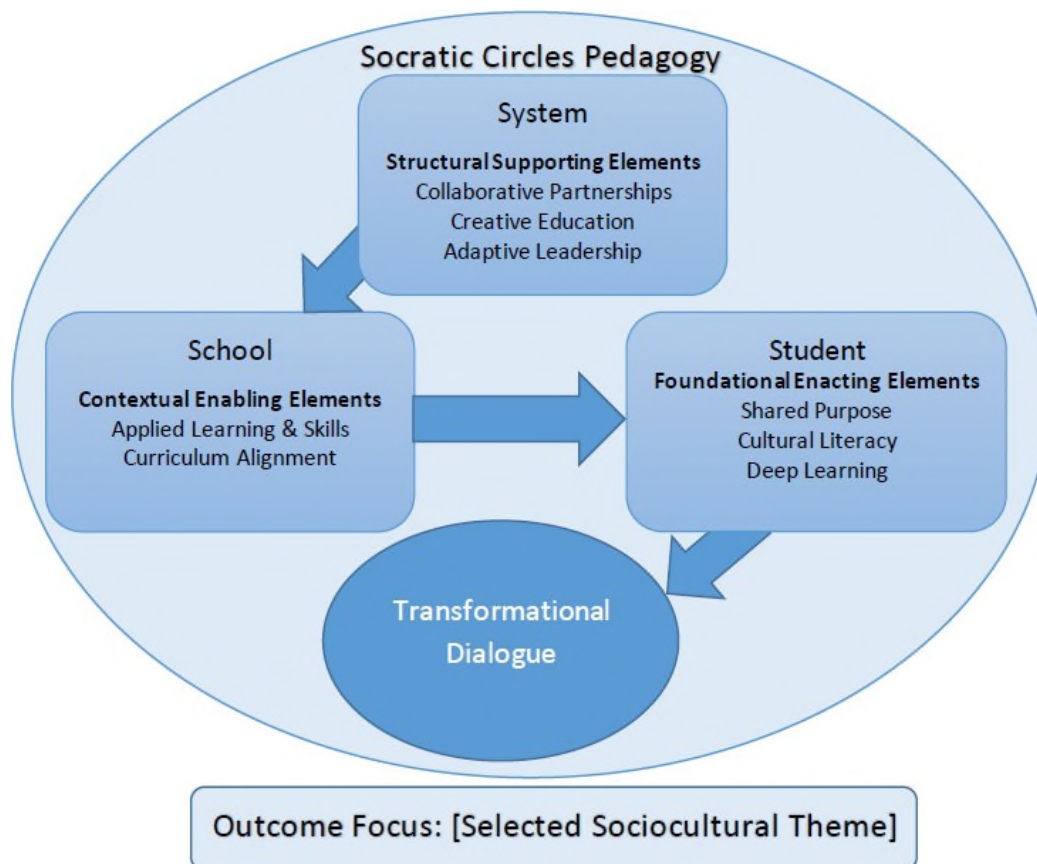
#### ***7.3.1 A Pedagogical Architecture for Transformational Dialogue***

Socratic Circles Pedagogy in the Values Education program provided a structure for dialogue, an architecture to support understanding and foster inclusion. The features of dialogue which enabled trust, authentic connection and transformational learning included striving for a multiplicity of perspectives; affirming the relationship between the participants through collaboration; encouraging the depolarisation of issues; and affirming the idea of people learning from each other and listening to understand, find meaning and agreement (Copeland, 2005). This research identifies Socratic Circles Pedagogy as an exemplar of dialogic teaching supported by the physical organisation of the learning space where students are seated in concentric circles facing one another and being accountable to each another in the exchange and contest of ideas.

Alongside the physical structure of the process, SCP establishes and maintains a learning and teaching environment that offers a pedagogical architecture for Transformational Dialogue. It is applicable to other contemporary sociocultural themes, represents a viable alternative to traditional didactics, is valued at systemic, school and student level and, is complementary to other pedagogies. Each of the elements described in detail in Chapter six and included in the Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework (Figure 7.1) make up the architecture for Transformational Dialogue and interact with one another. This interaction

occurs across the three levels of educational engagement: the macro - system, meso - school, and micro - student.

**Figure 7.1 The Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcomes Framework.**



The structural supporting elements at the macro system level include: Collaborative Partnerships, Creative Education, and Adaptive Leadership. These elements influence all levels of engagement in learning. Collaborative Partnerships recognise the interdependence of all key stakeholders in educational reform supported and resourced by education systems. Creative Education promotes powerful teaching for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and dispositions articulated in successive National education statements about educational goals which combine approaches of direct instruction and dialogic pedagogies and engage learners in critical thinking, reasoning and collaboration. Adaptive Leadership draws together the effective features of distributed and instructional leadership promoting personal and social transformation.

The contextual enabling elements of Applied Learning and Skills, and Curriculum Alignment operate at the meso - school level and influence the engagement in deep learning. Applied Learning and Skills provide opportunities for learners to apply their learning using critical and creative thinking processes where learners develop communication skills and

interpersonal capabilities. Curriculum Alignment ensures sustainability of improved teaching and learning practices in accord with the agreed and articulated aims of education.

The foundational enacting elements, Shared Purpose, Cultural Literacy, and Deep Learning are active at the micro - student level of engagement. Shared Purpose recognises clarity about the educative experience in values to be understood and shared among learners, and between students and teachers, supported by overarching priorities articulated as educational goals by system leaders. Cultural Literacy identifies the necessity to build genuine connections leading to authentic relationships in order to cultivate social cohesion. Deep Learning is characterised as learning which has impact beyond the learning experience: learning that develops knowledge, understanding, capability and disposition.

### ***7.3.2 Applicable to Other Contemporary Sociocultural Themes***

Beyond values education, Socratic Circles Pedagogy has potential applicability to other sociocultural themes. This pedagogical approach supports the surfacing of contested issues providing a frame for dialogue. Socratic Circles provides the structure for objectifying conflict through creating a safe space for conflict. In stark contrast to the adversarial nature of debate where opponents present subjective views on an issue, dialogue in Socratic Circles invites participants to explore a multiplicity of views towards a deeper understanding of an issue. This distinction reflects the applicability of SCP to other areas of learning and development. The learning experiences for student participants in the MIIC were recognised as instrumental in developing cultural literacy successfully; contributing to social cohesion; and furthering a growing realisation of global interconnectedness and interdependence.

The choice of an effective transferable pedagogy in Socratic Circles allowed for values education to be integrated into many and varied aspects of learning and teaching in the schools involved in the MIIC. SCP as an example of dialogic teaching is manifested in students asking more questions than teachers, collaborative learning, exploring ideas and building upon ideas through inquiry and dialogue. In addition, the influence of SCP on school personnel was evidenced in quality professional learning and initiatives related to values, character education, pastoral care and wellbeing issues.

### ***7.3.3 A Viable Alternative to Traditional Didactics***

The dialogic process of SCP provides an alternative to traditional didactics. As previously discussed, adolescent learners are less inclined to interact in traditional forms of

class discussion influenced by seating placements of a linear, rectangular, row by row organisation. The SCP fosters engagement with expectations of participation which results in more equitable participation. Rather than the potential for a few enthusiastic students answering the teacher's questions, all students are encouraged to interact in a shared investigation of a topic, asking and answering questions of each other. SCP allows the teacher to gain a deeper insight into each learner's thinking and critique and hence can differentiate further teaching. While SCP is not the only structure for classroom discussion, it provides an alternative to dominant traditional teacher-centric discussion structures.

As a process for dialogue in the MIIC, Socratic Circles was a learning strategy that provided a structure and process for objectifying conflict, giving students the support and direction to discuss contentious issues openly. Socratic Circles was understood to be an effective pedagogy for use with secondary students exploring interfaith and intercultural issues through a values lens.

The MIIC achieved its aim to create a diverse community of learning and practice providing a structure for dialogue: architecture to support deep thinking, understanding and inclusion. A re-organisation of the physical space of the classroom subverts the predictable role of teacher controlling students enabling students to control themselves and take responsibility for the dialogue through structured group work. Socratic Circles Pedagogy as explored in the MIIC was considered to support active learning and prompt more engaged learning dispositions when compared with traditional classes with predominantly lecture-style discourses. The inclusion of an outer concentric circle generally heightened active listening and promoted self-regulation. On some occasions, it was observed that students were reluctant to share their views which was addressed by teachers attuned to the dynamics and sensitivities of the specific groups.

Teachers play an important and flexible role in challenging and supporting critical thinking in students. At times teachers are specialists engaged in direct instruction, at other times models of the learning and/or skill, and other times moderators or facilitators of the thinking and dialogue. The teacher develops the skills to choose the pedagogy for the learner and the learning at the appropriate time. Student capability and learning focuses on the growth of the learner. Connecting learning from other contexts to the culture of the school adds another dimension of relevance. Socratic Circles processes had a self-regulatory effect upon teacher behaviour and the provision of regular feedback encouraged self-awareness and management.

The innovative dialogic approach adopted through the learning experiences of the MIIC proved a viable alternative to traditional didactics.

#### ***7.3.4 Valued at Systemic, School and Student Level***

At each level of engagement with education, the Socratic Circles Pedagogy is valued. At a system level, education is understood to play a key role in building communicative competence, personal and social capability as well as supporting attributes of critical and creative thinking in citizens. From a school perspective SCP represents a pedagogy which serves to address learning intentions, as well as personal and social development goals for individual fulfilment and community contribution. At a student level, SCP is valued as an opportunity to prepare for and participate in a dialogue with peers about something of relevance. Such a dialogue engenders a sense of the importance of student experience and voice.

Education reform is challenged to align and extend existing curriculum frameworks and be designed and delivered in consultation with school leaders and teachers and supported strategically. Education reform is hindered by politicisation of issues. In the case of the MIIC, the activity of the Cluster was highly valued as it addressed the initial polarising views of the Values Education reform by affirming the universality of the values for Australian schooling.

The aims of the MIIC were understood to align with the broad aims of education and the specific goals of the National Values Education initiative. Addressing conflict and cultural stereotypes is necessary to build genuine relationships to achieve social cohesion. The focus universal values of respect, responsibility, freedom, understanding, tolerance and acceptance chosen by the MIIC were appropriate for the composition of the student gatherings and dialogue. The opportunities for adolescent learners to develop social capacity in an intercultural setting resulted in young people learning with others, not merely learning about others and in the process learning about themselves. This meaningful learning experience was valued at the three levels of engagement.

The adoption of a cluster model of educational reform worked to support a diverse community of teachers and learners, building upon the knowledge and skills in each individual participating school. Any curriculum initiative needs to align with the overall strategic plan of an individual school and the specific goals set for school improvement. There was congruence between the broader reform initiative and the mission, vision and ethos of the participating schools which added value within and between the schools.

For the school leaders and teachers involved in the MIIC, Socratic Circles provided a complementary pedagogical approach to the teaching of values which supported the development of the social capacity of adolescents as they demonstrated values corresponding with democratic principles. The formal structure supporting Socratic Circles dialogue provided a counterpoint to the screen-saturated modes of online communication prevalent in teenage culture. The critical and creative aspects of the Socratic Circles dialogue activities provided real-time and face-to-face opportunities for collaborative thinking and truth-searching.

Students valued the learning opportunities provided in the MIIC activities as preparation for critical thinking and communicating with a diverse range of people during and beyond school. The Socratic Circles dialogic style was considered to be more realistic than traditional classrooms which are characteristically monologic. The Socratic Circles approach used throughout the life of MIIC was both challenging and supportive for students. Students were observed to be more engaged in the learning and attentive to other learners.

### ***7.3.5 Complementary to Other Pedagogies***

Socratic Circles Pedagogy is complementary to other pedagogies. As critical reading is an important part of the SCP process, it complements the scaffolding of reading and analysis of texts. In the pre-writing phase of the writing process, teachers build the field of the topic or issue and SCP may be employed to explore a deeper understanding in readiness for independent writing. Pedagogies which incorporate thinking routines may be utilised as a preparation for Socratic Circles as learners explore the kinds of questions they could ask during the inner circle discussion.

The research demonstrated, from a school leadership and teaching perspective, that learning about values in diverse cultural settings aligns with both the aims of education and the capacity of the Socratic Circles dialogue as effective in teaching, learning and demonstrating values. The influence of SCP on school personnel was evident in teacher professional learning; the application of creative pedagogies; provision of experiential opportunities; utilisation of creative assessment practices; management of classroom structures; leadership opportunities; collegial relationships and transferability of learning processes.

## **7.4 Transformational Effects of Socratic Circle Pedagogy**

Learning about values in diverse cultural settings through the pedagogical process of Socratic Circles dialogue provides opportunities for deep transformational learning. When

successful, learning moves from the theoretical to the enacted, from an idea to an encounter. As reported in this case, the students in the MIIC experienced learning about values as part of a co-created diverse community of young people. Complementarily, the values being discussed such as, respect, understanding and freedom, were those present in the lived experience of the Socratic Circles. This convergence of experience and focus consolidates the learning and contributes to the authenticity and relevance of the learning experience.

The contemporary prominence of intercultural capabilities and cultural literacy in national (ACARA, 2019) and state curriculum frameworks (VCAA, 2018) and other significant educational documents (UNESCO, 2015), reflects the enduring relevance of the MIIC from more than a decade ago. There is now a recognition of the integral role of teachers in modelling and scaffolding the characteristics and capabilities associated with good citizenship for transformational learning experiences. Teachers are supported to sustain the practices that support learning through dialogue, by integrating powerful pedagogy across learning areas and in extra-curricular initiatives. To sustain the reform, teachers become instructional leaders in professional learning communities in their own school contexts promoting opportunities for Transformational Dialogue.

Leadership capacity was developed during the MIIC project which contributed to the achievement of its aims. Leadership capacity was evident in the process of establishing goals, expectations and shared purpose. The strategic resourcing, considered planning, and coordination of the cluster of schools was evidence of adaptive and nuanced leadership. The coordination and evaluating of teaching and the curriculum and the provision of teacher professional learning and applied teacher practice created a supportive environment for reform enabling transformational learning. The leadership capacity of student participants was also prioritised as student agency was a hallmark of the MIIC. During both the Socratic Circles dialogues and in leadership and student executive roles, students had actual responsibility for activities and dialogue during the interschool gatherings. Students experienced a heightened sense of engagement in and ownership of the project as a result of their leadership agency which contributed to the transformational nature of the experience.

As a consequence of the regular gatherings of the MIIC, students were able to build trust which had a bearing on the quality of the dialogue and other learning activities. The provision of opportunities for self-reflection allowed students to distil the experience and consider the deeper impact of the learning. The experience of being in dialogue with others from different



faith and cultural backgrounds prompted students to reflect on their own faith development and cultural heritage.

Regular participation in organised activities gave students a more intense experience of the program and supported the building of relationships with other students. The creative activities of the MIIC were an extension of the ideas arising from the dialogue during the Socratic Circles discussions and provided opportunities to build relationships. Teachers were responsive to student strengths and interests and designed learning activities accordingly. Reflective of the transformational dimension of the dialogic experiences, the ideas and insights emerging from discussion in the Socratic Circles dialogue inspired the artworks created. It is likely that, had the Socratic Circles not mediated Transformational Dialogue inspiring deep learning and collaboration, the collective creative arts would not have resulted. Teachers played a role in validating the transformational experience through the promotion and curation of student artworks in multiple public exhibitions celebrating the students' work.

The work of and learning from the MIIC aligns with the aims of education and values education alike, promoting the personal, social and intellectual dimensions of the learner. Through the Transformational Dialogue of the Socratic Circles, the development of personal and social awareness and management occurred alongside growing knowledge and understanding of one's own and others' cultural identities. The dialogic process required interaction and socialisation with others with a determination to objectify conflict and it was through this structured process, that students were supported to demonstrate the values as a lived experience rather than just an academic exercise. Because of the deep learning experience, students developed deeper respect for and understanding of others.

Aspects of dialogic pedagogy strengthen values connecting to all aspects of schooling and resonates with the enduring and evolving aims of education. Creating opportunities to involve students in SCP about issues of importance to their learning and life experience serves the purpose to help form character and prepare young people for democratic citizenship. Dialogic teaching and learning is an approach which serves to depolarise conflicts and engender a respect for one's own and others' cultural identities. Collaboration in educational reform supports constructive learning and bipartisan support is required for initiatives to be sustained beyond political cycles. Powerful teaching is understood to create the conditions for developing and demonstrating active citizenship for life. Powerful teaching reflects intentional, deliberative decision-making around pedagogical choices for the content and context with a knowledge of the learner and seeking to support the progression of learning. This research confirms that

education has a role in preparing young people for lifelong learning. Notwithstanding that education serves an economic need to skill young people for the workplaces of the future, the most developed sense of the purpose of education responds to the imperative to develop the whole person including the social and emotional dimensions of the self.

## **7.5 Recommendations and Further Research**

This study has demonstrated the applicability of Socratic Circles Pedagogy for engaging adolescent learners in values education. Moreover, the framework presented identifies the structural variables in the process that enable Transformational Dialogue. As such, extending this process and pedagogical approach to other sociocultural priorities is worthy of exploration. Of importance in the extension of this work to other sites is the imperative of continuous participant engagement. As demonstrated by the breadth and richness of commentary by all participants in this study, the value of participant voice in any sites of future research should not be underestimated. The possible application of this framework to other contexts and possible research opportunities are outlined in the following sections.

### **Citizenship education**

There is an exciting opportunity for education authorities to embrace the principles of the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019b) which builds on past declarations signed in Hobart, Adelaide and Melbourne, which could prompt consideration of the potential of dialogic pedagogies in Citizenship education. Pedagogies such as Socratic Circles have been shown to support student capabilities to engage in robust democratic citizenship as evidenced in the MIIC. A re-engagement with civics and citizenship education (Department of Education and Training, 2020) presents an opportunity for investigation into the potential of Socratic Circles Pedagogy to improve learning outcomes in this learning area.

### **Broad implementation**

Notwithstanding the favourable outcomes for students, school leaders and teachers acknowledged that only a minority of students at each of the five Cluster schools in the MIIC were able to participate in the regular gatherings. This reflected the limited reach and life of the program. Student participants volunteered, applied, or were selected to participate and, generally, were characterised by an enthusiastic openness to the aims of the project. Student participants were student leaders or those who were considered strong candidates for student leadership positions. Of note is the recollection of a teacher that a student participant felt that

those who most needed the experience of the project were not necessarily the students who participated. Further research on the use of Socratic Circles Pedagogy in mainstream educational settings and with mixed ability groupings could provide insight into the application and effectiveness of this pedagogy more broadly.

### **Outcome focused**

This study demonstrated the efficacy of SCP with an outcome focus on Values Education. However, the approach is relevant to a range of contemporary sociocultural foci. The Socratic Circles Pedagogy Outcome Framework provides an opportunity for curriculum advisory boards and organisations to review National Curriculum frameworks and state iterations to identify areas to address progressions in learning related to cultural literacy. As schools continue to implement the teaching and learning of Capabilities as outlined in curriculum frameworks (VCAA, 2016), there are opportunities to investigate the applicability of dialogic pedagogies such as Socratic Circles in these contexts. Additionally, research into the potential use of SCP in response to scenario stimuli would provide insights into the efficacy of dialogic teaching and classroom learning cultures. Within a national context, research into the use of SCP in teaching and learning of values; capabilities; general learning areas; the Humanities; the Arts, and Religious Education presents as significant.

### **Collaborative approaches**

This study has demonstrated the learning benefits of collaborative partnerships in, between, and across schools, sectors and systems supported by national and state education departments. Collaboration supported coordination to enact quality purposeful values educational reform using integrated processes to design and deliver improved learning and wellbeing outcomes. During the MIIC project, a diverse group of leaders, teachers and students were able to learn from and with each other in partnership. The deep learning evident in this study and supported by school leaders and teachers suggest the applicability of open engagement and dialogue through the structured process informed methodologies of Socratic Circles Pedagogy. Further research into collaborative approaches to system-wide reform could provide insight into the applicability of dialogic pedagogies in different school contexts.

### **Professional learning**

The inclusion of professional learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers in the MIIC provided support to build a repertoire of creative dialogic practices. The professional learning enabled SCP to be applied consistently in multiple learning contexts in different

settings. Education system providers of professional learning should prioritise support for teachers to develop capabilities for dialogic teaching using pedagogies such as Socratic Circles to cultivate critical thinking, reasoning and collaboration for problem-solving complex issues and challenges. Teachers that are supported by school leaders and system mentors to use SCP are likely to achieve improved learning and wellbeing objectives. Research on the application of Socratic Circles in settings beyond classrooms would provide insights into the effectiveness of dialogic protocols in work and community settings. For example, professional learning communities or teams, may benefit from using Socratic Circles to provide a structure for surfacing and exploring issues openly and democratically.

### **Cultural literacy**

This study has demonstrated the relevance of using SCP in scaffolding the development of cultural literacy - knowing and understanding one's own and others' cultural dimensions. Through this formal dialogic process students explored issues related to values including the beliefs and behaviours which guide democratic citizenship in a multi-faith and multi-cultural Australia. Through the formal discussions and informal interactions and creative learning experiences learners moved from monocultural ways of thinking and being through multicultural to intercultural understanding of others, towards transcultural being with others. Research with a focus on contemporary responses to educating for cultural literacy could provide insight into how dialogic pedagogies support this learning.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

In our world today, citizens are challenged by complex issues of local and global significance. Education plays a key role in building in learners, the knowledge, understanding, dispositions and capabilities to participate within communities seeking solutions to shared problems. This research has identified the effect of Socratic Circles Pedagogy in embedding values learning through dialogue for adolescent learners within a culturally diverse learning environment. This research, exploring the perspectives of student, school and system levels of inquiry has revealed Socratic Circles Pedagogy as an inter-connected set of elements that prompts Transformational Dialogue. The interacting elements within and across the three levels of engagement and inquiry underpin an architecture of the Socratic Circles Pedagogy which promotes learning and achieves relational outcomes.

Moreover, the efficacy of Socratic Circles Pedagogy evident in the case study explored in this thesis, demonstrates worthy implications for wider educational application. The identification of Transformational Dialogue experienced through Socratic Circles Pedagogy as

both an effective process and positive outcome in the context of values, affirms its relevance as a contemporary educational approach. Values such as, respect, understanding and freedom are expressed through the dialogic process of Socratic Circles and the relationships which develop from this interaction. The resultant Transformational Dialogue, a key outcome of the creative pedagogy employed in the MIIC case, occurs when students apply their theoretical knowledge of a value and demonstrate that value through dialogue and relationship.

A renewed understanding of the congruence of an education in values with the enduring and evolving aims of education prompts consideration of how to build character and nurture active and responsible citizenship. Socratic Circles Pedagogy promotes the synthesis of divergent views and experiences by balancing existing tensions in safe spaces promoting respect and connection while seeking truth. Teachers play an essential role in nurturing these democratic microcosms of inclusive communities where critique and dissent are valued within a commitment to the common good. Leaders and educators emboldened by the aspirations of education can enable transformational learning opportunities, as Socratic Circles Pedagogy provides, to support young people as they imagine and create a future for themselves with others.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A Ethics Consent Forms and Information Sheets




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### INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: Values Education and Schooling: An investigation of the Socratic Circle approach as a pedagogy for adolescent learning in Values Education.

SUPERVISORS: Prof. Judith Chapman and Dr. Marian de Souza

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ms. Catherine Devine

PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear

My name is Catherine Devine and I am currently undertaking my PhD at the School of Education (Vic), with the supervision of Prof. Judith Chapman and Dr. Marian de Souza.

My study is concerned with investigating Values Education as a reform in Australian schooling, particularly as it relates to the use of the Socratic Circle approach as a pedagogical tool for adolescent learning. The purpose of the study is to examine the nature of this discussion tool and its application in the area of Values Education.

My study is using a number of data collection instruments including interviews and focus groups. Interviews will be undertaken individually for approximately 45 minutes.

I wish to invite you, as a former member of the Values Education group, to participate in a single interview of 45 minutes.

The study seeks to clarify the role of disciplined conversation in adolescent learning about values. The research gives participants the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and observations of good practice in the school setting.

As a component of any research study, researchers are required to consider possible risk or harm to participants. There are no foreseen risks or harm in participating in this study. It is not anticipated that the study will be requesting private, personal or confidential information, but rather information about the nature and processes of the participants' involvement in Values Education. Every care will be taken to protect the identity of participants. Contributions will be identified by reference to role rather than name. It is likely that the research will be published in a range of Education journals and confidentiality will be protected in any report or publication arising from the research.

Participants are at liberty to refuse consent entirely without justification, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor and the Student Researcher:

Prof. Judith Chapman  
(03) 99533254  
School of Education  
St Patrick's Campus

Ms. Catherine Devine  
(03 94784840  
School of Education  
St Patrick's Campus

Upon consideration of data analysis, participants will be offered a summary of the aggregated results of the study.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator or Supervisor and Student Researcher has (have) not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Office.

VIC: Chair, HREC  
C/- Research Services  
Australian Catholic University




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**CONSENT FORM**

Copy for Researcher/Copy for Participant to keep

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Values Education and Schooling: An investigation of the Socratic Circle approach as a pedagogy for adolescent learning in Values Education.

**SUPERVISORS:** Prof. Judith Chapman and Dr. Marian de Souza

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Ms. Catherine Devine

I ..... ( the participant) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I am willing to participate in an interview:     Yes                     No

I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty, and without affecting my future relationship with researchers. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

**NAME OF PARTICIPANT:** .....

**SIGNATURE:** .....

**DATE:** .....

**SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:** .....

**DATE:** .....

(and, if applicable)

**SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** .....

**DATE:** .....

## Appendix B Socratic Circles Pedagogy Rubric

Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School by Matt Copeland. Copyright © 2005, Stenhouse Publishers.

	Student:	Hour:	Date:	Topic:				
<b>Socratic Circle Rubric</b>	<b>Reading of text and preparation for circle.</b>	<b>Engaged in discussion and stays on-task.</b>	<b>Supports ideas with references to the text.</b>	<b>Encourages thinking and participation in others.</b>	<b>Listens respectfully and builds from ideas of others.</b>	<b>Presents self and ideas in a civil and proper manner.</b>	<b>Questions insightfully and uses sound reasoning.</b>	<b>Accepts more than one point of view on the text.</b>
<b>5 Outstanding</b>	Remarks and written work reveal a close, critical reading of the text and thorough preparation.	Demonstrates active and eager participation throughout entire circle. Keeps group on-task.	Makes specific references to text to support and defend ideas on a consistent basis.	Guides the direction and success of the circle and takes steps to involve all participants.	Listens unusually well. Comments indicate very accurate and perceptive listening.	Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm. Works to support all participants at all times.	Questions and ideas are apt, insightful, and logical; and contribute to construction of meaning.	Accepts points of view other than own and uses them to expand ideas and discover new meaning.
<b>4 Good</b>	Remarks and written work reveal a close, critical reading of the text, but preparation appears incomplete.	Active and eager participation in more than 80% of circle. Keeps self on-task always and others at times.	Makes specific references to text to support and defend ideas often and when challenged.	Attempts to guide circle and draw in participants and is most often successful.	Listens well. Pays attention and generally responds well to ideas and questions from others.	Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm. Supports all participants most of the time.	Questions and ideas are apt, insightful, and logical but may not fully help meaning construction.	Accepts points of view other than own and attempts to use them to discover new meaning.
<b>3 Average</b>	Remarks and written work reveal a close reading of the text, but ideas seem to be less than complete.	Active and eager participation in more than 50% of circle. Stays on-task most of the time.	Makes specific references to text to support and defend ideas only when challenged.	Attempts to guide circle and draw in participants but is not always effective.	Generally listens well but is not always attentive as evident in responses or body language.	Demonstrates respect but may be less than totally supportive of others at times.	Questions and comments are apt and logical but lack insight to move group forward.	Acknowledges other points of view but struggles to use them to expand meaning.
<b>2 Below Average</b>	Remarks and written work do not reveal a close, critical reading of the text.	Some active participation in circle; may be less than eager. Off-task frequently.	Makes few references to text to support and defend ideas even when challenged.	Attempts to guide circle and draw in reluctant participants are not successful.	Comments tend to reflect an earlier failure to listen carefully to what was said.	Speech and manner suggest lack of understanding of purpose. Lacks sense of teamwork.	Questions and ideas reveal personal reactions, but not logical apt arguments.	Argues with other points of view and reluctantly acknowledges them as a possibility.
<b>1 Not Acceptable</b>	Remarks and written work suggest the text was not read.	No active participation in circle. Others may be distracted by behavior.	Makes no specific references to text to support and defend ideas.	Makes no attempts to guide circle or draw in reluctant participants.	Does not listen adequately. Comments or body language suggestive of inattentiveness.	Does not display respect or enthusiasm for circle or other participants.	Remarks are illogical, difficult to follow, and offer the group no benefit.	Does not acknowledge or accept other points of view.

## Appendix C Sample of Observation Notes

Extracts from: **Values Education Good School Practice Project: Phase 2 - University Associates Network-Reports (June 2007 & March 2008) of the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster**

"Our assessment of the work of this cluster is overwhelmingly positive. The aims of the cluster are clearly articulated and widely shared. Leadership provided by the cluster co-ordinator, has been imaginative, purposeful, strong and committed. The operation of the cluster has benefited from the immense energy, creativity and good will from school co-ordinators. The students have been enthusiastic and engaged. This cluster's work is at the cutting edge of educational reform and societal change. It is to be commended as a model for future inter-school and inter-sectoral work in Australian education, particularly in the areas of values education and intercultural understanding."

"The cluster has achieved its objectives with great success. Objectives are clearly articulated and provide a sound basis for the design and implementation of learning activities. The main objective of the cluster is to provide opportunities for young people from different schools, cultures and faith traditions to come together and discuss issues such as values, national identity, social cohesion, and citizenship. The purpose of the cluster's work came out of a desire to respond to some of the disturbing and negative activities in the Australian community, in particular the Cronulla riots in 2005. It was hoped that the work of the cluster could contribute to fostering positive relationships among young people of different cultures and faiths and in so doing contribute to a stronger sense of community and social cohesion among the students and within society more broadly. The work of the cluster is not focussed on learning about different faiths or world religions. Instead the aim was to provide opportunities for social interaction among students from different cultural and faith traditions, so that they could dialogue around important, relevant and significant social issues."

"Staff cluster meetings reveal a high degree of learning among staff engaged in the project. Staff are communicating with each other, learning about how different schools work, learning about the importance of particular protocols, cultural sensitivities, traditions associated with food and hospitality."

"Feedback from students regarding what they've observed and what they've heard has shown a considerable amount of agreement in terms of what respect means and how respect manifests itself in relationships and in the community."

"The inter-sectoral representation and collaboration is one of the most original and powerful characteristics of this cluster. Strong leadership and an immense amount of commitment and good will among school co-ordinators have enabled this collaboration to flourish."

"The Socratic Circle is designed to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment. The students are educated about how to give feedback, how to start a sentence when giving feedback, how feedback needs to be specific, that feedback must not be personal. Students learn that feedback needs to have some constructive element to it and that in giving positive feedback it is important to give some feedback about areas for improvement and some direction. When such feedback comes from students' peers, rather than teachers, it appears to be particularly effective."

"One of the advantages of Socratic Circles is that it gives student support and direction when discussing potentially difficult and contentious issues. There is safety in the structure of the Socratic circle. Students know their roles, they have had an opportunity to read material from the media file; they are not being asked questions they haven't seen before, or asked about things they haven't had a chance to think about before. The project design and process is meant to provide student support."

"One key issue in planning related to the nature and content of the Socratic Dialogues. When the application was being prepared and the project was being planned there was a great deal of instability in the Middle East and a degree of social unrest in Australia. In this context, staff from the cluster schools considered the extent to which they should try to plan, limit and direct student conversation. In an early cluster meeting staff talked about whether there were "some things we didn't want the students to speak about like the Middle East, terrorism or the right to wear religious dress." Were there some things that were a "bit too hot to handle?" Staff came to the conclusion after discussion that they shouldn't set limits, but that as educators they were ultimately responsible for regulating any conversation that might "heat over or become volatile". It should be pointed out that this hasn't happened and this is a credit of the students and to the staff who have created a learning environment of mutual respect. It should be noted that one advantage of Socratic Circles as a learning strategy is that it provides for systematic dialogue and the objectification of conflict."



## Appendix D Examples of Resources for Scaffolded Tasks

RESOURCE SHEET 1: Critical reading guide: 'What values-focused questions should I ask of the text?'

Some examples of texts for study in Socratic Circle discussion include:

- newspaper or journal article
- editorial
- artwork
- lyrics of a song
- poem
- political cartoon
- comic strip
- extract from a narrative
- scene from a film or documentary
- advertisement
- political or corporate promotional material
- policy statement or documents
- Hansard transcript
- Quotation
- photograph

'What values-focused questions should I ask of the text?'

- What is the content of the text?
- What is the style and tone of the text?
- In what historical, literary and social context was the text constructed?
- What is the purpose of the text?
- What does the author of this text want me to think, feel & question (in other words, 'How am I being positioned as a reader of this text?')
- What can I learn about myself and others from reading this text?
- What connections can I make between this text and others?
- What are my emotional reactions to this text?
- What images does this text evoke for me?
- What writing techniques has the author used to construct this passage?
- Does the text resonate with any of my own life experiences and knowledge?
- What is the cultural reference and expression of the text?
- Does the text leave unanswered questions and unresolved issues?
- Is there anything ambiguous or confusing about the text?
- How could I confirm the accuracy of the information presented?
- What kinds of judgments am I making as I read the text and how do they fit with my belief system?
- What can I predict about the consequences and possibilities of the ideas presented in the text?
- What do I presume about how other individuals/groups would respond to this text?
- What cultural images and metaphors are used to convey meaning?
- Whose voices are present in the text and whose voices are absent?
- Which values are at the heart of the meaning of this text?



- RESOURCE SHEET 2: 'Sentence starters for referring to text in discussion and when giving feedback to the group.'
1. Referring to the text in discussion: some examples of sentence starters:
    - What struck me most about the text was the ...
    - What connections did others make to the theme of ...?
    - Every time I read ..., I got a sense that the author felt ...
    - What specific words and phrases in the text did you find most powerful?
    - I thought the overall message of the text was ... and linked to ...
    - Did anyone know what ... meant? I found this confusing.
    - I thought the metaphor of ... was culturally insensitive given ...
    - What questions did others come up with in their preparation?
    - I think the purpose of this text is to ...
    - Does anyone else think there is a double meaning in the line, ...?
    - This text relates to the film/book/artwork/song/issue ...
    - Does anyone think the themes dealt with in this text are relevant to our contemporary society? If so, which ones?

## 2. Giving feedback to the group

The key to feedback is being SPECIFIC and pinpointing the positives of a particular person's contribution as well as offering some constructive ideas about how to improve their participation.

Use the examples below as a guide to the sentence structure of feedback:

- X, when you brought up the point about ..., it tied in well with one of the themes in the text ...
- I thought X's question about ... to the group really opened up the discussion.
- X really tried to include quiet members of the circle by asking specific questions in a non-intimidating way.
- X's point about ... was well-thought -through/ meaningful/ insightful/ appropriate/ reflective, because it linked with the part in the text where ...
- X referred to the text numerous times with gave evidence for the ideas she/he presented.
- I would like to commend X for raising the point about the different layers of the text, particularly ..., because it showed a deeper understanding of the text.
- X has a strong and clear voice and she/he used her/his voice to make the point about ..., and was very convincing.
- X's judgment about ... showed some bias and could have been explored further.
- Those who didn't contribute very much at all, need to prepare more thoroughly and refer to their notes during the next discussion.
- X was very responsive to other ideas and this showed her/his open-mindedness and maturity.

