



NSW Ethics Course Trial

Final Report

October 2010

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**The *NSW Ethics Course Trial* Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NSW ETHICS COURSE TRIAL

INTRODUCTION

In November 2009, the then Premier of New South Wales, Nathan Rees, announced a program to implement a pilot Ethics course as a complement or alternative to Special Religious Education (SRE), also known as Scripture, in NSW public schools. The course was to be taught to Stage 3 students in ten schools across Sydney and country NSW. The announcement came in response to a formal request from the St James' Ethics Centre in conjunction with the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW (Federation of P&C) (St James Ethics Centre 2009). Responsibility for the organization of the ethics trial rested with the St James Ethics Centre. The Centre engaged Associate Professor Philip Cam from the University of NSW to develop a ten-lesson Ethics program to be run during the time allocated for SRE in Term 2, 2010. The Department conducted its own evaluation of the trial, appointing the authors of this report as independent investigators.

The evaluation of the ethics course was designed to:

1. Provide an overview of the trial ethics course.
2. Critically analyse the quality of the course content, activities and resources.
3. Evaluate the efficacy of the course in relation to improving students' understanding of and skills in ethical decision making.
4. Determine whether the organization used by the St James Ethic Centre for the ethics trial for Stage 3 students is a viable option for wider implementation in NSW government schools.
5. Make recommendations for improvement to the quality of the course and support materials and/or the arrangements for the delivery of the course.

(Terms of Reference, *Evaluation of ethics course trial*)

The evaluation took the form of an investigation comprising:

- An account of arguments for the trial of an ethics based complement to SRE and a consideration of objections to these arguments, as well as an account of the history of efforts on the part of the Federation of P&C and St James Ethics Centre to gain approval for such a course.

- An account of the tasks undertaken on behalf of the St James Ethics Centre in its organization of the trial and an assessment of the efficacy of this organization in light of both criticisms from SRE providers and qualitative data gathered from trial school principals and volunteers.
- A course overview which includes a description of the broad philosophical framework within which the course is situated and an account of course content and methodology, as well as a critical analysis encompassing a consideration of objections from religious groups and information provided by trial school principals and volunteers.
- A report of the empirical study conducted investigating the extent to which the aims of the trial course were achieved.

BACKGROUND: THE CALL FOR AN ETHICS-BASED COMPLEMENT IN NSW GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Special religious education in NSW schools

Within the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (n.d.p.1), 'Special Religious Education' is defined as 'education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorized representatives of that persuasion'. Special Religious Education has been part of the curriculum in NSW state schools since the inception of free public education in the State and is legislated for in the Education Act of 1990 (Section 17), as is the right of parents to withdraw their children from this kind of religious teaching (Section 18). The Department of Education's policy on the Implementation of Religious Education (last updated 2007) states that:

Schools are to provide appropriate care and supervision at school for students not attending SRE. This may involve students in other activities such as completing homework, reading and private study. These activities should neither compete with SRE nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as ethics, values, civics or general religious education. (Section A 11.)

Arguments for an ethics-based complement to SRE

Over some seven years the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations, on behalf of its affiliates and with the support of the St James Ethics Centre, has advocated for a 'meaningful option' for those children who opt out of SRE. (Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, *Submission on the Ethics Program*, p.1; St James Ethics Centre, 2009). Here, the term 'meaningful' is not used to refer to purposeful learning in general, but to a particular *kind* of purposeful learning, *viz.*,

learning within the field of Ethics. It is argued that it is both discriminatory and harmful to youth mental health to deny non-SRE children the right to examine what it means to lead a morally good life, a right which SRE students are granted through participation in their SRE courses. In an assessment of these claims, the 'discrimination' argument is judged to be sound, and the conclusion of the 'mental health' argument to be established, conditional on the truth of the research-based premises.

ORGANISATION OF THE ETHICS COURSE TRIAL

Responsibility for the trial's organization and financial support lay with the St James Ethics Centre which, through the efforts of an appointed Pilot Project Coordinator, took on the tasks of sourcing a curriculum, recruiting schools and volunteer teachers, arranging a training session for volunteers, and maintaining a webspace to provide ongoing volunteer support.

It was decided that the pilot would run in ten schools across metropolitan and country NSW. The schools were self selected, nominated by their Parents and Citizens' Associations. Approximately 530 students participated in the trial. The sample was considered large enough and sufficiently diverse to yield reliable pilot data.

Volunteers were recruited from each school community, with the recruitment process managed by school principals in close consultation, on the whole, with Parents and Citizen's committee representatives who served as points of contact between the schools, the St James Ethics Centre and the volunteers.

Professor Philip Cam was engaged to develop a curriculum for the pilot and to design and facilitate a volunteer training program which was held over two full days, one week apart. The training program included a general introduction, some Q & A sessions, and a child protection session conducted by DET, but the focus was on the lessons the participants were to deliver in the classroom. Each lesson was run through in 'classroom mode', with Professor Cam as the facilitator. In each workshop session the lesson was prefaced by talk about the content and process of the lesson and the session was concluded with discussion about what occurred during engagement in the lesson (Professor Philip Cam, email correspondence 13th April 2010).

Invitation to participate in the ethics course: letter to all Stage 3 pilot- school parents

At the beginning of the 2010 school year, a letter (entitled 'Ethics Pilot Information and Permission' and carrying St James Ethics Centre's letterhead) was sent to parents and carers of all Year 5 and 6 students attending the pilot schools, inviting those students' participation in the ethics classes. The decision to invite participation from all Stage 3 students, rather than only those Stage 3 students who had in the past opted out of SRE, was made by the Centre on advice from the Department of Education and Training. The decision was made on two distinct grounds, firstly, that it is a requirement of the 'Implementation of Religious Education' policy that all parents are informed annually about all religious persuasions offering SRE within a school; and secondly, that parents can change their minds about SRE attendance at any time (Clause C1 of the Policy) and, it appears, to some extent do, so that to restrict the offer to parents of children opting out of SRE at one particular time would be inequitable. (Mr Brian Elliott, NSW Department of Education and Training, interview 3rd August, 2009).

It should also be noted that while the letter to parents and caregivers includes a provisional course outline, the Policy states that:

The school is not responsible for and should not disseminate details of lesson content for SRE, but may indicate the name and method of contacting the approved provider or their local representative (Clause 3A 16).

This seems unnecessarily restrictive, and it would seem desirable that parents be provided with information that will allow them to make a considered choice about their children's SRE attendance, without having to make personal contact with individual providers.

It is recommended that information about SRE curricula and other such courses at individual schools be made available to parents/carers in the form of fact sheets to mirror the DET fact sheets for parents on Gender or Drug education. The fact sheets should provide no more than a summary of the aims and processes of the different SRE offerings, and each summary should be no more than two paragraphs in length. It might be useful for the DET to design a template for this purpose.

Criticisms from SRE providers

The decision to invite participation from all Stage three students in the pilot schools has generated controversy, with religious groups criticising the decision on a number of different grounds. Some of the objections rest on matters of principle, while others ('process' objections) are criticisms of the

decision making process employed by St James Ethics Centre and the DET. Process criticisms point to a lack of clarity in communication with SRE providers, a criticism which seems justified, and to misunderstandings on the part of parents, allegedly the result of ambiguities of the letter. This argument is judged to lack support. The criticism based on principle rests on the claim that extending the invitation to take part in the ethics trial to children already attending SRE classes is at odds with the assertion that the ethics course is not in competition with, but rather a complement to, SRE; a complement aimed at offering a meaningful option to non-SRE students. The St James Ethics Centre has responded to this criticism by pointing to its undertaking to make available to faith groups for their use in scripture classes, 'all of the material that might be created as part of any program to develop an ethics-based course of study' (St James Ethics Centre, n.d.c.).

An assessment of this exchange concludes that student movement from SRE to ethics classes was a by-product of respecting parents' rights rather than an attempt to undermine the teaching of SRE.

Teaching arrangements

Volunteers, P&C co-ordinators and principals of trial schools faced a number of challenges in the early weeks of the trial. These difficulties were outside the control of St James Ethics Centre and included last minute confusion over whether the trial would go ahead, uncertainty about the arrangements for pre-testing, unprecedented media attention and, in the case of some schools, divided communities, with principals receiving angry and personal criticism. The fact that the lessons ran successfully during this period seems to point to strong commitment and good will on the part of all involved, as well as to the strength of the administrative support provided by the St James Ethics Centre.

Future concerns

A decision to roll out the ethics course more widely would raise crucial issues in relation to organization, management and funding. St James Ethics Centre paid all costs of running the pilot and further roll-out would require significant financial and organizational resources in order to support a project orders of magnitude more complex than the ethics trial. The Centre has initiated discussions around such an eventuality and initial planning ideas, based on a gradual roll out beginning with Years 5 and 6 students, are presented in the document 'Future Considerations: Ethics Programs as an option for Children Who Don't Attend Scripture Classes in NSW Public Primary Schools' (Ms Teresa Russell, email, 7th July, 2010). It is noted that the planning ideas put forward by the St James Ethics Centre are speculative. However, experience in the organisation of the ethics course trial, together with detailed

preliminary plans, makes the St James Ethics Centre well placed to manage a wider and gradual rollout of ethics as a complement to scripture.

Should a decision be made to offer the ethics course more widely, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Training engage in dialogue with the St James Ethics Centre regarding the management of this roll- out.

The DET, through Mr Brian Elliott, has expressed a number of concerns about the management of a wider roll-out of the ethics course, derived in part from experience of the trial. These include concerns that additional responsibilities would fall to school principals and that additional and ongoing organisational input would be required from the Department (Interview 3rd August 2010). These concerns are well founded as indicated by the description in the previous section of challenges faced by school communities. Moreover, it seems clear that further responsibilities would be imposed by the need to ensure that approved providers meet the same high standards of probity required of providers of Special Religious Education. Religious organisations must seek the approval of the Minister before they can teach SRE in schools. Over one hundred providers are now registered, and applications are referred to the Minister by the DET. Over time, a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to SRE is likely to attract applications from any number of providers and these applications should be subject to the same approval process as applications from religious organisations. This imperative not only imposes a further impost on the DET, but raises issues in relation to approval criteria.

These criteria should include a provision to ensure that the curriculum content is bounded by the subject matter of the branch of Philosophy known variously as Ethics or Moral Philosophy. The criteria should be developed by a group of independent experts in the field, who might also be charged with the responsibility of reviewing applications from providers and making recommendations to the Minister. It is suggested that the composition of the group be at the discretion of the Minister, but that members could include experts in philosophical inquiry from institutions such as the School of History and Philosophy, University of New South Wales; the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, the University of Sydney; and the Philosophy in Schools Association of New South Wales, as well as a representative from the Department of Education and Training.

It is suggested further that in any wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to scripture, it be made clear that the term 'ethics-based' means 'based on Ethics as a branch of Philosophy', or equivalently, 'Moral Philosophy-based', and to this end that the ethics-based complement to SRE be described as a

course in *Philosophical Ethics*, or equivalently, a *Moral Philosophy-based* course, or given some such name in order to make clear the boundaries of its content.

In addition it is suggested that a consultative committee be established to allow regular meetings between ethics providers, the DET and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern.

In summary then, it is recommended that in the event of a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to Special Religious Education:

- a. the ethics-based complement to scripture be described as a course in philosophical ethics, or equivalently, a moral philosophy-based course, or given some such name in order to make clear the boundaries of its content;*
- b. a group of independent experts be established at the discretion of the Minister, to oversee*
 - i. the formulation of criteria to ensure that any ethics course conducted during Special Religious Education time has as its content the subject matter of Ethics as a branch of Philosophy, and against which applications for the provision of such courses could be considered; and*
 - ii. the assessment of such applications, and subsequent recommendations to the Minister;*
- c. that a consultative committee be established to allow regular meetings between ethics providers, the DET and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern.*

While recognising the need for such administrative changes and the consequent demands on the Department of Education and Training, the strong and principled arguments for ethics as a complement to SRE would seem to necessitate that such changes be made and that the DET is adequately resourced to provide support to all parties, should a decision be made on the part of government to offer the ethics course more widely.

OVERVIEW AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICS TRIAL COURSE

The overarching aim of the course is to 'provide a secular complement for the discussion of the ethical dimension of students' lives' (St James Ethics Centre n.d.d).

The secular framework

The secular framework for the course is provided by the discipline of Philosophy, and more particularly by the sub-discipline of Ethics. As a branch of Philosophy, Ethics is concerned with the rational exploration of questions such as ‘How ought one to live?’ and ‘How should we go about justifying our moral judgements?’ In the West, such exploration dates back over two and a half thousand years, to Plato.

Within modern moral philosophy, there are a number of widely agreed upon basic tenets. The most fundamental of these is a commitment to rational processes of argument and justification. There is also widespread agreement on more specific ideas, for example, the notion that morality is grounded in suffering and wellbeing and the understanding that humans (and to varying extents other sentient beings) share common capacities for such suffering and well being, an understanding which delivers the notion of ‘equal human worth’. Other widely accepted views include a rejection of moral relativism. (See for example Cullity (2004) and Beebe (2010).)

In modern moral philosophy, such principles are widely held to form the basis of rational ethical decision making. It is concepts such as these that Professor Cam aims to introduce to children through his pilot curriculum. But more than this, he is concerned to encourage students to consider the way in which these fundamental ideas play out in the making of moral decisions, as well as the role of other factors, such as the circumstances in which an action is performed and the facts relevant to the issue¹. From this it is clear that Professor Cam’s curriculum is directed towards meeting the following four of goals set for the pilot course, *viz.*:

- Introduc[ing] the language of ethics and in doing so... provid[ing] the tools to survey the values and principles we live by;
- develop[ing] the intellectual capacity and the personal attitudes needed for participating in ethical reflection and action;

¹ For example, when considering the moral rightness or wrongness of an act of lying, the judgement might well depend in part on the circumstances in which the liar finds herself (whether the lie is necessary to save a life, say); and deciding whether it is morally right to hunt and kill whales for food will involve coming to grips with scientific facts about both whale intelligence and the risk of endangering the survival of distinct whale species.

- develop[ing] students' ability to identify the relevant stakeholders and thoroughly explore, among other things, the consequences of proposed resolutions to the ethical dilemmas which they are considering; and
- inspir[ing] an appreciation of virtues and ideals.

(St James Ethics Centre, n.d.d)

The curriculum: overview

The curriculum consists of 10 lessons, each exploring either a particular ethical question (for example, 'What makes a practice or action fair or unfair?') or a feature of the ethical decision making process itself (for example, the use and nature of ethical principles). The lessons are built on a process of discussion-based ethical inquiry, in which students engage in dialogue around the relevant subject matter, guided both by questioning from the volunteer teacher and thought provoking teaching resources designed for this purpose. It is intended that through such processes of ethical inquiry, students will come to develop the abilities and dispositions to engage in ethical reflection and to formulate well founded ethical judgments. The emphasis on dialogue-based ethical inquiry is directed towards meeting the remaining aims set out for the ethics pilot course, viz.:

- offer[ing] a secure, non-judgemental space to explore the question, "What ought one to do?";
- encourag[ing] an openness towards important personal and public issues and
- introduc[ing] dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues.

(St James Ethics Centre, n.d.d)

The curriculum materials outline each lesson's 'procedure' in detail, and as a series of discrete steps. A procedure common to a number of lessons involves the use of ethical scenarios which are transcribed onto cards and distributed, one to each group of two to three students. An example from the lesson on lying is this: *You know that the person asking you for help has often lied to you, so you decide to lie to them.* Students engage in discussion of their scenario within their group and then declare their position (for example, whether the scenario described is fair or unfair, more acceptable or less acceptable, right or wrong), by placing the card on an appropriately marked place on the floor. Groups are then called upon to justify the placements of their cards; to give reasons for their decisions.

Members of the class then discuss the various placements and explore their disagreements. The role of the volunteer here, as well as working to establish appropriate speaking and listening behaviour, is to intervene when necessary 'to keep the discussion focussed...[and to] assist students to uncover any general conditions or considerations' that underlie the reasons that have been given (Cam 2010). Examples of such general considerations might include the idea that whether an action is right or wrong, fair or unfair, or morally better or worse depends on the circumstances in which the action is performed, or on its consequences, or on how much suffering the action causes or how much good it brings (Cam 2010). In the procedure for some sessions, suggestions are given as to questions volunteers might ask in order to encourage students to uncover some of these general principles. In later sessions, there is an increasing emphasis on not only providing reasons for ethical decisions, but also unearthing the principles underlying these reasons, and considering what to do when principles conflict; that is, deciding which principles are more important than others.

The curriculum then, seems designed to enable students to build, gradually and systematically, an understanding of the principles underlying reasoned ethical decision making.

Critical analysis of the course

The philosophical framework within which the course is situated is argued to be appropriate for a course that is to serve as a complement to the ethical component of SRE. The dialogue-based ethical inquiry approach around which the lessons are built has been consistently well evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in developing ethical reasoning skills, (Lyle, 2008; Garcia et al., 2005), and so seems well suited to a course which is to serve as a complement to the ethical component of SRE.

The analysis is based on an examination of the materials and resources themselves, observations of their classroom use, and interviews with volunteer teachers and principals. Observations were made and interviews carried out in weeks 4 and 6 of the trial, and comprehensive summaries of the data gathered from these interviews can be found in Section 5 of this report.

Interviews with volunteers indicated that overwhelmingly, they found the lesson procedures helpful, and that, with some significant qualifications, the procedures themselves guided the lessons productively. The resources were evaluated positively, on the whole, although again important qualifications were expressed.

Classroom observation, as well as an analysis of the materials themselves, have led to the conclusion that while fundamentally sound, the lesson procedures and resources require some modification if the goals of the ethics course are to be achieved. This claim is expanded on in what follows.

Critique of course materials: strengths

In each of the 17 lessons observed, students appeared excited by the issues the scenarios raised, readily articulated their views and backed those views with reasons. The reasons given were invariably relevant, most often pointing either to consequences for those involved (in the form of harm, both immediate physical or mental harm (for example, pain or humiliation) and longer term, more general harm (for example, the extinction of a species), or to a principle, such as ‘we shouldn’t kill harmless creatures’ or ‘If we have to kill (pests, say, or animals for food) we should do so painlessly’ or ‘It’s not wrong to use animals for human purposes (for example as guide dogs) if it is good for both humans and animals’. However students’ reasoning was often hampered by lack of factual knowledge: for example, not understanding what bullfighting involves, or not knowing that cane toads are an introduced species, or what climate change is. The lessons in which students were asked to judge the degree of acceptability rather than the rightness or wrongness of a practice were highly successful in encouraging students to consider circumstances (for example, killing whales is more acceptable ‘if you are on land without plants and animals to eat – a whale could feed a whole village’).

In the lessons observed, volunteer questioning played an important role in stimulating children’s thinking and encouraging dialogue. Volunteers asked a great many procedural questions (such as ‘Does anyone want to respond’, ‘Can anyone add to what x has said?’, ‘Can you say that in another way?’ ‘What reasons do you have for that view?’, ‘Is your view similar to that of x?’), questions which encouraged students to engage in further exploration.

These observations, together with the reports from volunteers, seem to indicate that the implementation of the course had gone some way towards achieving the goals set for the ethics pilot.

Critique of course materials: limitations

However, the course as it stands has a number of limitations that restrict the depth of students’ thinking, and hence restrict the degree to which the course aims can be achieved. As indicated earlier,

each lesson consists of a detailed procedure, set out as a series of steps. The number of steps varies from six to thirteen, depending on the lesson. In most lessons, all but the final one or two steps are directed at having students (in groups) consider a scenario, form an opinion on it, and provide reasons in support of that opinion. As already argued, this is a valuable process in that the ability to state an ethical position and to put forward a justification for it plays an important role in reasoned ethical decision making. But the fact that an individual has offered a justificatory claim does not mean that the justification is sound. Some attempts at justification are better than others. To deny this is to embrace the dangerous position of moral relativism, the idea that 'anything goes', the dangers of which are all too clear. Reasoned ethical decision making demands an examination of the reasons offered in justification of ethical beliefs and actions; an examination which, within the philosophical framework described, must be carried out on the basis of fundamental principles, such as the notion that morality is grounded in suffering and wellbeing and the understanding that humans (and to varying extents other sentient beings) share common capacities for such suffering and well being, together with a consideration of factors which need to be taken into account when employing these fundamental ideas in the making of moral decisions; factors such as the circumstances under which an action is performed and the facts relevant to the issue.

While within the ethics curriculum there is some attention paid to examining reasons offered, the attention seems slight, finding expression in one (or very occasionally) two procedural steps in a lesson outline. Given that these steps of necessity constitute the later stages of the lesson, there is also a danger that lack of time will mean that the process of evaluating reasons is omitted from the lesson altogether. This is in fact what happened in all but one of the lessons observed. The lessons are designed to run for 45 minutes, but it is estimated that those observed would have taken close to an hour to complete. This same point was made by principals, some of whom also appeared to have gained the impression from observing classes that there are 'no right and wrong answers' required in ethics, or, as another principal put it, that the ethics program place little emphasis on the development of a 'moral compass'. On top of this, most schools had scheduled SRE within a 30-minute time-slot. Volunteers themselves commented on the time constraints, noting that 'many things are skipped over due to time'. In the lessons observed, there was insufficient time to allow students to struggle through the formulations of the principles that were guiding their reasoning; rather the volunteer had little choice but to 'put words into their mouths'. There was also little time to encourage students to expand on their ideas, or to ask follow-up questions. There was unanimous agreement that it would be advantageous for each lesson to run over two weeks, which would also give students time to mull the issues over and investigate any factual questions which have arisen.

It is recommended that in any future iterations of this course:

- a. each topic be taught over two or more consecutive weeks; and*
- b. in relation to this expanded time frame, that the curriculum materials be modified to include specific guidance in teaching for a process of reason evaluation.*

Time was not the only confounding factor here. Many of the volunteers saw their role as *solely* one of encouraging students to express their ideas and reasons in order that many different viewpoints come to be aired in the classroom or that students learn to disagree without anger. A number of volunteers also expressed the view that ‘there are no right or wrong answers’. These misconceptions impose limitations on the course, and while recognising that the training sessions themselves were bound by tight time constraints, it is recommended that in any future iteration of the course, the training program be extended, if not in duration then at least in content, to allow for a brief consideration of the issues around moral relativism.

A further point relates to volunteer questioning. As indicated above, in the classes observed, volunteers used procedural questions skilfully and effectively. But there is another kind of question which must be asked too, in order to encourage students to reflect upon and evaluate their beliefs and reasons. As well as procedural questions it is necessary to ask substantive follow up questions, in order to encourage students to consider important factors they have not thought of. It is important to note that such questions are not aimed at changing children’s minds, but simply at encouraging them to look at all relevant factors. Here is an example:

Student (explaining why elephants shouldn’t be hunted for their tusks): *‘There will be less number of elephants.’*

Teacher: *‘What if there were lots? Would it be OK then?’*

Student: *‘Yes’.*

Very little substantive questioning was observed. This may have been the result of time pressure, or of a lack of confidence on the part of volunteers who were (rightly) concerned not to channel children’s thinking in a particular direction. In any case, substantive questioning is a skill that develops as a result of practice, and it is recommended that in any future training sessions, consideration be given to setting aside time for volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry sessions. Again, the time constraints that operate here are acknowledged. A final point relates to volunteers’ concerns about

behaviour management and it is recommend that these concerns too, be taken into account in any future training programs.

In summary, it is recommended that in any future iteration of the course, training be extended in order to allow for:

- a. a consideration of the issues around moral relativism;*
- b. an opportunity for volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry lessons within the training sessions; and*
- c. a greater focus on behaviour management techniques.*

Criticisms from religious groups

In submissions to this evaluation, a number of faith groups have raised concerns about the course. Again, it seems unfortunate that documentation supporting and explicating both the philosophical framework within which the course sits and the 'ethical inquiry' pedagogy employed were not made available to the religious groups. Such information would have gone some way to allay fears that the course is based on moral relativism or mere values clarification and related worries that within an ethical inquiry approach peer pressure becomes the arbiter of moral worth. It can be seen how these impressions might have arisen from the curriculum material that was publicly available. In evaluating the course materials an effort has been made to consider the philosophical background and the pedagogical approach on which the course is based. The field of Moral Philosophy has a two and a half thousand- year history and a logically rigorous methodology; the ethical inquiry approach has been employed widely for three decades by philosophers concerned to introduce philosophy (including ethics and logic) to the broader community. These are philosophers who decry relativism.

No doubt any proposed program of moral education is open to criticism, the ethics pilot program included. Some of these criticisms have been outline above. Any such program must be judged in large part by the outcomes it achieves. In the following section a description is given of an empirical study designed to determine the outcomes of the ethics pilot course in relation to its aims.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

The empirical study was designed to determine the effectiveness of the ethics course trial in relation to improving students' understanding and skills in ethical decision making (Term of Reference 3). Both quantitative and qualitative measures were employed in the mixed-method evaluation.

The quantitative study

The quantitative project took the form of an intervention study implemented over 10 weeks in 10 NSW government primary schools. The schools varied in relation to both geographical location and socio-economic status. A pre-post test instrument was used to capture:

1. the extent to which students were able to distinguish between ethical and non ethical issues;
2. the extent to which students were willing to approach /avoid engaging in discussion of ethical issues; and
3. the effect of the intervention's dialogue-based ethical inquiry approach on the development of individuals' ethical reasoning skills.

Pre-testing was carried out in an ethics course classes during week 1 or week 2, and in most cases post-testing of participants was administered during the final week of the course. However in the case of three schools, post-testing was not undertaken until approximately eight weeks after completion of the course.

In relation to the first research aim, participants were asked to indicate whether each of six examples of everyday issues were 'ethical' or 'non ethical'. Two of these items were clear examples of ethical issues, for example, 'Working out whether lying to your friend is wrong'; two were included as clear examples of non-ethical issues (for example, 'Deciding which sport to play this term',) and one was included as a more complex example that might be classified as either 'ethical' or 'non ethical', depending on participants personal experiences. Complete data across the 2 occasions were furnished by 359 students. Details of statistical analyses performed on these data can be found in Section 6 of this report. Results indicated that the impact on ethics identification scores was significant at a moderate rather than a strong impact level. In other words, following participation in the ethics course, students improved in their ability to recognise everyday ethical issues as such; that is as issues that affect the wellbeing of others. This finding indicates that some progress has been made in meeting the course aim

of introducing students to the language of ethics, and reflects a deepening of students' understanding of the nature of ethics and ethical issues.

In relation to research aim 2, participants were to indicate how often each statement was 'true for them' on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'almost never true' to 'almost always true'. Details of statistical analyses performed on these data can be found in Section 6 of this report. Results indicated that after participating in the ethics program, students evidenced enhancements in their dispositional approach scores, and reductions in their avoidance tendencies. The finding that students were more willing to approach discussions of ethical issues and less likely to avoid such discussions indicates that the trial course has gone some way towards meeting two key aims: 'encouraging an openness towards important personal and public issues' and 'introducing dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues'.

In relation to the third research question, participants were introduced to a real world ethical issue through a series of news headlines and a brief written scenario describing a series of shark attacks occurring at a local beach. The question of whether the suspected shark should be hunted and killed was raised within the text. Participants were then invited to indicate whether they thought the shark should be hunted and killed by circling one of three possible answers: 'Yes', 'No', or 'I don't know'. They were then asked to explain their answer by writing their reasons in the space provided. This process of eliciting children's views and justification of controversial issues in writing is widely employed among educators and researchers investigating the development of argument skills and dispositions (Kuhn & Udell, 2003; Reznitskaya, Anderson, McNurlen, Nguyen-Jahiel, Archodidou, & Kim, 2001). It was possible to compare what the students had written on the two test occasions in terms of simple content analyses. (Details of the coding system used is given in Section 5 of the report.) In this manner it was possible to match the protocols from 281 students. Results indicated that in terms of content analyses the only significant change found reflected the number of ethical principles cited within the protocols.

It is disappointing to find little apparent change in the ethical reasoning items across the two time intervals but the results are, in some ways, not surprising. As indicated in earlier sections, the effectiveness of the dialogue-based 'community of inquiry' approach in fostering ethical reasoning skills and disposition like those reflected in Table 5.6 (p.74) has been well established. In the case of the current intervention however, it seems that, due to severe time constraints, coupled with the volunteers' lack of experience in raising substantive philosophical questions and facilitating whole class discussions, community of inquiry methodology was not widely employed in the trial of the ethics course.

The significant increase in the number of ethical principles cited in written protocols from time 1 to time 2 is reflective of the emphasis within course content on exploring and applying ethical principles when considering ethical issues. Students' increased ability and willingness to appeal to a principle when making ethical decisions appears to reflect a deepening of their understanding that ethical decisions necessarily involve reference to general standards.

In summary, the impact of the Ethics Course on participants' *Ethics Identification Scores*, *Approach-Avoidance Scores* and citing of *Ethical Principles* in written protocols was significant. As such, it can be concluded that the programme has, in a relatively short space of time, been effective in achieving a number of the course aims. Moreover and impressively, the effects appear to have been sustained in participants who completed the post test more than two months after the completion of the Ethics trial. Further details can be found in Section 6.1 of the report.

The qualitative study

- General observations of students and volunteer teachers working together were made by two members of the research team during 17 ethics classes conducted in Weeks 4 and 6 of the trial. A summary of data gathered via detailed note-taking during observations is included in the Findings (Section 6.2).
- Small group discussions of between 2-6 volunteer teachers were facilitated by two members of the research team in 8 schools at the mid-point of the ethics course trial. The group discussions ranged in duration from 30-60 minutes. The questions which guided the discussion can be found in Section 5.
- Eight principals from participating schools were interviewed individually by two members of the research team. Interviews lasted between 20 – 40 minutes. Again, the questions which guided the discussion can be found in Section 5.

Participants' responses were recorded in writing then collated and analysed thematically by an experienced member of the research team. The findings are summarised in Section 6, and have been drawn on in a number of sections of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Should the decision be made to offer an ethics-based complement to SRE more widely, it is recommended that the trial ethics course evaluated in this report be adopted, subject to qualifications expressed in Recommendations 2 and 3.

Recommendation 2

That in any future iterations of this course:

- a. each topic be taught over two or more consecutive weeks; and*
- b. in relation to this expanded time frame, that the curriculum materials be modified to include specific guidance in teaching for a process of reason- evaluation.*

Recommendation 3

That in any future iteration of the course training be extended in order to allow for:

- a. a consideration of the issues around moral relativism;*
- b. an opportunity for volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry lessons within the training sessions; and*
- c. a greater focus on behaviour management techniques.*

Recommendation 4

Should a decision be made to offer the ethics course more widely across the state, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Training engage in dialogue with the St James Ethics Centre regarding the management of this roll-out.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that in the event of a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to Special Religious Education:

- a. *the ethics-based complement to scripture be described as a 'course in Philosophical Ethics', or equivalently, a 'Moral Philosophy-based course', or given some such name in order to make clear the boundaries of its content;*
- b. *a group of independent experts be established at the discretion of the Minister, to oversee:*
 - i. *the formulation of criteria to ensure that any ethics course conducted during Special Religious Education time has as its content the subject matter of Ethics as a branch of Philosophy, and against which applications for the provision of such courses could be considered; and*
 - ii. *the assessment of such applications, and subsequent recommendations to the Minister;*
- c. *that a consultative committee be established to allow regular meetings between ethics providers, the DET and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern.*

Recommendation 6

That information about SRE curricula and other such courses at individual schools be made available to parents/carers in the form of fact sheets to mirror the DET fact sheets for parents on Gender or Drug education. The fact sheets should provide no more than a summary of the aims and processes of the different SRE offerings, and each summary should be no more than two paragraphs in length. It might be useful for the DET to design a template for this purpose.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this evaluation has been to consider the extent to which the ten-week ethics course described in this report has been successful. The course has been put forward by St James Ethics Centre as a complement to Special Religious Education. It is hoped that the information provided in response to the evaluation's Terms of Reference will serve to inform forthcoming decisions about whether this course should be offered more widely.

The findings of the evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the course in relation to improving students' understanding and skills in ethical decision making, and the overall appropriateness of the course content, activities and resources and of the associated training. The evaluation also points to the success of the organisational model employed by the St James Ethics Centre, and considers the viability of this model for wider implementation of the course in NSW government schools.

Within the Education Acts of all Australian States there is provision for some form of special religious education. In all states too, the Acts provide parents with the opportunity to withdraw their children from SRE classes, but it appears that no state implements a structured program of learning for non-SRE students. However a wider search of the religious education policies of other western governments reveals that the idea of offering an ethics based alternative to SRE is not new. Germany serves as a useful model here².

In accordance with the German Federal Constitution (the “Basic Law”, Article 7, Clause 3), Religious Instruction forms part of the regular curriculum of state schools in most German *Länder*³, and (Clause 2) parents and guardians have the right to decide whether their children are to attend religious instruction classes (Füssel 1999).

Religious Instruction is taught ‘in accordance with the doctrine of the Religious community involved’, and so in practice, by representatives of approved religious persuasions (Clause 3, *ibid.*, Füssel 1999).

Where a choice is made not to take Religious Instruction, students are offered a course in Ethics, variously called ‘Ethics’, ‘Values and Norms’, or ‘Philosophy’, amongst other titles. Despite differences of title, and to varying degrees, of content, these courses share a common aim, namely to develop an understanding of socially important moral values and norms and to enable students to think critically and act reasonably and responsibly (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany 2008.) In most *Länder* this course is now compulsory for non-Religious Instruction students (Füssel 1999). Ethics courses have been offered to non-Religious Instruction students since the mid- nineteen eighties in many *Länder*, in a country where a large majority of citizens claim to hold religious beliefs. In the 2007 International Religious Freedom Report, it is estimated that one-quarter of the German population either have no religious affiliation or belong to unrecorded religious organizations (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2007). This is in comparison to the 31% of Australians who indicated either ‘no religion’ or failed to adequately describe a religious affiliation in the 2006 census (ABS 2008).

² Alison Collins is thanked for her assistance with translation from the German.

³ As Füssel (1999) notes, because of the so-called ‘Bremen clause’, there are some *Länder* (*viz.* Berlin, Bremen and Brandenburg), to which this rule does not apply.

The call for a secular ethics-based complement to SRE in NSW schools is not without precedent, and there is evidence here that secular ethics and SRE can exist respectfully side by side. In this evaluation an attempt has been made to assess the extent to which the ten week ethics pilot provides an appropriate model for an ethics-based complement to scripture, and to do so on the basis of rational argument and empirical evidence. Further decisions rest with the Minister.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In November 2009, the then Premier of New South Wales, Nathan Rees, announced a program to implement a pilot ethics course as a complement or alternative⁴ to Special Religious Education (SRE), also known as scripture⁵ in NSW public schools. The course was to be taught to Stage 3 students in ten schools across Sydney and country NSW. The announcement came in response to a formal request from the St James' Ethics Centre in conjunction with the Federation of Parents and Citizens' (Federation of P&C) Associations of NSW (St James Ethics Centre 2009).

The Request cites 'broad and diverse' (p.1) community and parent support for an ethics-based complement to SRE, with the argument centred on the rights of those children whose parents have chosen not to have them attend the weekly SRE classes legislated for in the Education Act of 1990 (Section 32). More particularly, it is pointed out that current NSW Department of Education policy on the implementation of Religious Education prohibits children not attending SRE classes from 'any form of instruction during this period, and specifically not in the area of ethics, values, civics and general religious education' (NSW Department of Education and Training n.d., Section 3A) and as such, it is argued, is socially unjust as it denies these children 'an equal opportunity to deepen their understanding of what makes for a good life...' (St James Ethics Centre 2009, p.1).

1.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT

Responsibility for the organization of the ethics trial rested with the St James Ethics Centre. The Centre engaged Associate Professor Philip Cam from the University of NSW to develop a ten lesson Ethics

⁴ Both terms have been used to describe the relationship of the Ethics course to Special Religious Education, and there is dispute about which is the more apt.

⁵ 'Special Religious Education' is defined as 'education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorized representatives of that persuasion' (NSW Department of Education and Training, Section 1, n.d.). The distinction between special and general religious education is spelled out in Section 2.1 of this report.

program to be run during the time allocated for SRE in Term 2, 2010. The NSW Department of Education and Training and Board of Studies were given the opportunity to comment on the age appropriateness of the course content as well as on policy issues, but as is the case with Special Religious Education (SRE) materials, have neither approved nor endorsed the course. In addition, through the Pilot Project coordinator, Ms Teresa Russell, the Centre instituted recruitment processes for schools and volunteer ethics teachers (the latter being as far as possible consistent with recruitment procedures used for the selection of SRE teachers), organised a two day volunteer training course led by Professor Philip Cam and provided ongoing support for schools and volunteers during the course of the trial. After consultation with the NSW Department of Education and Training, an Ethics Pilot Permission Note was sent to all parents of Stage 3 students in the pilot schools. There were two reasons for this decision. Firstly, parents have the right to make choices in full knowledge of the alternatives open to them. This is consistent with the requirement of the Implementation of Religious Education policy that all parents are informed each year about all persuasions offering SRE within a school. The second reason is that all parents can (and, it appears, to some extent do) change their minds about SRE attendance at any time, so that to restrict the offer to parents of children 'opting out' of SRE at one particular time would be inequitable (Mr Brian Elliott, NSW Department of Education and Training, interview 3rd August, 2009). The result was that approximately 530 students across the ten schools participated in the trial. Approximately 170 of these students came from SRE classes (Numbers confirmed by email from Mr Brian Elliott, DET 8th April 2010).

1.3 THE EVALUATION

The Department conducted its own evaluation of the trial, appointing the authors of this report as independent investigators. All members of the evaluation team hold doctorates in areas relevant to the evaluation task, have contributed to large scale empirical studies in the area of philosophy in schools, and published extensively in this and related areas. The terms of reference for the evaluation read as follows:

The evaluator is required to deliver a report which:

1. Provides an overview of the trial ethics course;
2. Critically analyses the quality of the course content, activities and resources;
3. Evaluates the efficacy of the course in relation to improving students' understanding of and skills in ethical decision making;
4. Determines whether the organization used by the St James Ethics Centre for the ethics trial for Stage 3 students is a viable option for wider implementation in NSW government schools; and

5. Makes recommendations for improvement to the quality of the course and support materials and/or the arrangements for the delivery of the course.

1.3.1 METHODOLOGY

The methodology appropriate to the first and second terms of reference (overview of the trial ethics course and analysis of course quality, respectively) is description, analysis and argument, much of it theoretically based. The overview and critical analysis of the course comprises Section 4.

The third term of reference (evaluation of the efficacy of the course in relation to students' decision making skills and understandings) requires an investigation of classroom practice, as well as an empirical study targeting learning outcomes. Accordingly, the empirical study includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses of data collected from observations of ethics classes, interviews with volunteers and student pre- and post test surveys. This evaluation study is described in Sections 5 and 6 of the Report.

The fourth term of reference (determination of whether the organization used by the St James Ethics Centre for the ethics trial is a viable option for wider implementation) requires both an investigation into the organization used by St James Ethics Centre for the current trial, and an assessment of the capacity of the Centre to organize a large scale rollout of ethics classes as a complement to SRE. This term of reference demands a process of fact finding *via* discussion with stakeholders. To this end, members of the evaluation team conducted face-to-face interviews with representatives from the NSW Department of Education and Training, St James Ethics Centre, the Parents and Citizens' Association of NSW and members of the Director General's Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education, as well as with the curriculum writer, Professor Philip Cam and principals and volunteers from eight of the ten pilot schools. Principals and volunteers from the remaining two trial schools were offered the opportunity to provide written and/or telephone feedback and all stakeholders were invited to provide written submissions. Discussion relevant to this term of reference can be found in Section 3 of this document.

Finally, in response to the fifth Term of Reference (making recommendations for improvement to the quality of the course and support materials and/or the arrangements for the delivery of the course), the recommendations stem from the findings in relation to all other Terms.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Section 2, *Background: The call for an ethics based complement to Special Religious Education in NSW Government schools*, provides an account of arguments for the trial of an ethics based complement to SRE and a consideration of objections to these arguments, as well as an account of the history of efforts on the part of the Federation of P&C and St James Ethics Centre to gain approval for such a course.

Section 3, *Organisation of the ethics trial*, presents an account of the tasks undertaken on behalf of the St James Ethics Centre in its organization of the trial and an assessment of the efficacy of this organization in light of both criticisms from SRE providers and qualitative data gathered from trial school principals and volunteers.

Section 4, *Overview and critical analysis of the trial ethics course*, provides a course overview which includes a description of the broad philosophical framework within which the course is situated and an account of course content and methodology, as well as a critical analysis encompassing a consideration of objections from religious groups and information provided by trial school principals and volunteers.

Sections 5 and 6, *The empirical study: methodology and The empirical study: findings* is a report of the empirical study conducted as an investigation into the extent to which the aims of the trial course were achieved. The format of these sections is standard for such reports, consisting of two sections: Methodology and Findings.

Section 7, comprises the *Recommendations*, and Section 8, the *Conclusion*.

SECTION 2

BACKGROUND: THE CALL FOR AN ETHICS BASED COMPLEMENT TO SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NSW GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

2.1 SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NSW SCHOOLS

Within the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 'Special Religious Education' is defined as 'education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorized representatives of that persuasion' (n.d., p.1) and can be contrasted with General Religious Education, which is characterised as 'education about the world's major religions, what people believe and how that belief affects their lives', and is 'taught mainly through the school curriculum' (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, n.d., p.1.). Special Religious Education has been part of the curriculum in NSW state schools since the inception of free public education in the State, itself a cumulative process taking place over the second half of the nineteenth century (NSW Department of Education and Training 2010). The Public Schools Act of 1861 legislated for the provision of Special Religious Instruction (Section 17) and the rights of parents to withdraw their children from this kind of religious teaching (Section 18). The Public Instruction Act of 1880 left these provisions intact (Rawlinson Committee 1980), as did the Education Act of 1990.

2.2 PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITHDRAWN FROM SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In 1901, the date of the first Australian census, a mere 0.04% of the population declared that they had no religious affiliation. In 1971 (the year the instruction 'if no religion, write none' was introduced), the figure had risen to 7%; by 1996, it had more than doubled to over 16%, and by 2006 had increased again to 19% (ABS 2008). This change has implications for the implementation of Special Religious Education in NSW government schools. Data on changes in the number of students whose parents choose for them not to take SRE were unable to be accessed, but it can be inferred from the census data that the number is likely to have increased steadily and significantly over the last forty or so years. The Rawlinson Committee's 1980 Report into Religious Education in NSW Government Schools recommends:

That pupils withdrawn from Special Religious Education be provided with opportunities for purposeful secular learning which should, however, be of such a nature as to avoid conflict of

choice, either for parents or for the pupils receiving Special Religious Education.
(Recommendation 42, adopted by government)

The Department of Education's policy on the Implementation of Religious Education (last updated 2007) is more specific, stating that:

Schools are to provide appropriate care and supervision at school for students not attending SRE. This may involve students in other activities such as completing homework, reading and private study. These activities should neither compete with SRE nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as ethics, values, civics or general religious education. (Section A 11.)

Beyond this, there is no state wide policy on how schools and teachers are to deal with non-SRE students. It appears that what these students do during the Special Religious Education period varies from school-to-school. In a submission to this evaluation, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales state that:

Students may be asked to stay in the classroom and do private study at the back while SRE is taught at the front of the class. They may be allowed to go to another part of the school such as the library or may join in with another class.

(Submission on the Ethics Program, p.3)

In addition, respondents to a 2006 survey of Federation of P&C affiliates listed the following as non-SRE activities provided by their schools: colouring in and keeping quiet, reading, building Lego, games, private study, homework, normal classes, and watching television.

2.3 CONCERN OVER PROVISION FOR NON-SRE STUDENTS: ARGUMENTS FOR AN ETHICS-BASED COMPLEMENT TO SRE

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations, on behalf of its affiliates, has voiced concern at the obvious emptiness of these non-SRE activities, and over some seven years, with the support of the St James Ethics Centre, the Federation has advocated for a 'meaningful option' for those children who opt out of SRE. (Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, *Submission on the Ethics Program*, p.1; St James Ethics Centre 2009). Here, the term 'meaningful' is not used to refer to

purposeful learning in general, but to a particular *kind* of purposeful learning, *viz.*, learning within the field of Ethics. It is argued that it is both discriminatory and harmful to youth mental health to deny non-SRE children the right to examine what it means to lead a morally good life, a right which SRE students are granted through participation in their SRE courses.

The 'discrimination' argument rests on a recognition that SRE is concerned with both metaphysical beliefs about the existence of a creator (or 'ultimate source' as the Rawlinson Committee (1980) puts it), and an ethical code, describing how to live a morally good life. A second premise is that it is possible to offer an investigation into the grounds of ethical decision making without reference to theology. The Rawlinson Report (1980) is called upon to support this claim:

5.35 [E]thics, the study of morals and values, is valuable for its own sake and ...people can be moral without being religious, in that they do not need to subscribe to religious beliefs in order to sustain carefully thought-out moral principles.

(St James Ethics Centre n.d.a, p.1)

The argument then proceeds as follows:

We think that all children attending public schools should be afforded the opportunity to deepen their understanding of what makes for a good life, without parents having to abandon their personal convictions in matters of religion.... While the standard curriculum certainly aims to educate children in values and principles, it is also acknowledged that those children attending scripture are able to have this work extended in lessons with a particular focus on this domain of life. It is unfair and unreasonable that some children are denied this opportunity for extension simply as a consequence of their parents' choice not to have them attend scripture classes.

(St James Ethics Centre 2009, pp1-2)

The 'youth mental health' argument is now considered. This argument rests on three premises (St James Ethics Centre 2009, pp.3-4). The first is the claim that '[p]resumably, children who attend scripture have the opportunity to learn about values and virtues and examine fundamental questions such as 'what is our purpose?' or 'what is the meaning of life?'. The second premise refers to a recent development in a number of disciplines, 'from psychology and medicine, to ethics and education', *viz.*, a shift in focus 'from the cause of pathologies to the traits and qualities that create wellbeing or vital

mental health', and cites the results of the newly focused research, as well as the publications from which these results have been sourced:

The results: those who report the greatest life satisfaction or happiness, enjoy a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives; a sense of hopefulness (optimism) that they can make a difference; and have an inclination to contribute because they believe their lives will have an impact.

Sources: Martin Seligman, psychologist, *The Optimistic Child*

William Damon professor of education, *The Path to Purpose*

Stephen Post, bioethicist, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*

(St James Ethics Centre 2009, pp.3-4)

The third premise is the claim that:

...according to numerous studies, over the past decade... [feelings of hopelessness and helplessness] can be overcome through early intervention which includes reflection and action....

(St James Ethics Centre 2009, pp.3-4)

The conclusion is then drawn:

[B]y denying some children the opportunity to extend their exploration of fundamental themes such as purpose, meaning and benevolent behaviour, we are essentially denying them an opportunity to contribute to their own wellbeing, and by extension, that of the community.

(St James Ethics Centre, 2009, pp.3-4)

2.3.1 ASSESSMENT OF THE ARGUMENTS

The 'youth mental health' argument is considered first. The assessment here is brief, as the authors do not have expert knowledge of the research areas to which it refers. However, the first premise, that children who attend scripture have the opportunity to learn about values and virtues and examine fundamental questions such as 'what is our purpose?' or 'what is the meaning of life?', seems uncontroversial, and it seems clear that if the research-based premises are true, then the argument's conclusion follows. It seems equally clear that if these premises are true; if life satisfaction is tied to a

sense of meaning or purpose in life, and if feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness can be overcome by reflecting on questions of purpose and meaning, then to deny some children the opportunity to engage in such reflection is to risk grave consequences.

The authors' assessment of the 'discrimination' argument is more detailed. The first premise, the claim that SRE is concerned with both metaphysical claims and an ethical code, seems uncontroversial. The second, that there is no necessary connection between well reasoned ethical judgment and religion, seems equally well established given the 2,500 year old history of Ethics as field of Philosophy.

The argument proceeds with the assertion of a principle, *viz.*, that all children have a right to equal opportunities to engage in examination of what makes for ethical thinking, without parents having to abandon their personal convictions in matters of religion. Again, the principle itself seems uncontroversial, although questions have been raised about its relevance here. It has been argued that such examination occurs in the key learning areas of the compulsory curriculum, as well as in SRE, so that even without an ethics-based complement to scripture, all children have an opportunity to engage in ethical reflection.

The place of values education in the standard curriculum is spelled out in the document 'Values Education in NSW public schools' (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2004). According to the document, the NSW approach to Values Education rests on the identification of a set of core values which 'represent the aspirations and beliefs of the Australian community as a whole' (DET 2004, p.3). In classrooms, teachers 'make values more explicit by including strategies that highlight the core values in their lessons'. Moreover, 'discussing the meanings of core values as they occur helps students to develop their understanding of these values and how they operate in a variety of contexts' (DET 2004, p.4).

While acknowledging the importance of values education within the compulsory curriculum, a further premise of the 'discrimination' argument points out that those children attending scripture are able to have this important work extended, so that on the basis of the uncontroversial principle that all children have a right to equal opportunities to engage in examination of what makes for ethical thinking without parents having to abandon their personal convictions in matters of religion, non-SRE students should have access to extension in the form of a secular ethics course as a complement to scripture. It is clear that that the philosophical search for, and justification of, moral principles that informs the ethics pilot, provides such an extension. This last point is spelled out detail Section 4 of

this report. It should be noted that this 'extension' argument would seem equally telling against the claim that the ethics trial course should form part of the compulsory curriculum. A further point can be made here: if non-SRE students are disadvantaged by the lack of opportunity for deep ethical reflection, then they would also seem to be disadvantaged in relation to their lack of opportunity for consideration of the metaphysical questions with which SRE deals. It might be argued then that a secular complement to SRE should have a broader philosophical sweep.

However this last point does nothing to undermine the 'discrimination' argument and, on the basis of the above considerations, it is concluded that this argument for an ethics-based complement to scripture is sound.

2.4 COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR AN ETHICS BASED COMPLEMENT TO SRE: A HISTORY

As indicated in the previous section, the Federation's involvement with this issue has a long history. Some 97% of individual school Parents and Citizens' Associations are affiliated with the Federation, so that body must be seen as representative of Parents and Citizens' Associations in New South Wales (Ms Dianne Giblin, interview August 3rd, 2010).

As early as 2003, members passed a motion in support of an ethics-based complement to SRE. Subsequently, the St James' Ethics Centre agreed to support the Federation of P&C in advocating for changes to the relevant legislation (the Department of Education's policy on Implementation of Religious Education, last updated 2007) to allow for the provision of such a course, presenting a proposal to the former Minister of Education, Andrew Refshauge who responded that 'there was neither scope for implementation, nor was there a community wide call'. In 2004, the proposal was resubmitted to the then Minister of Education, Carmel Tebbett, and was again rejected (St James Ethics Centre 2009, p.2).

At the Federation's 2005 Annual Conference, a further motion was passed unanimously, asserting 'the right of students whose families choose to exclude them from Special Religious Education to have access to an alternative ethics program approved by the Department of Education and Training, and was followed by two action items, also carried.

The first required the Federation to initiate discussions with the Minister for Education and Training in an effort to progress changes to current legislation so as to facilitate the development of an ethics education program for voluntary implementation in New South Wales Schools 'as a complement to the religious teachings currently offered in Special Religious Education but to have a non theological basis', the second, calling for 'adequate training... provided by the Department of Education and Training to schools to implement the approved ethics program as an alternative to religious Education' (Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, *Submission on the Ethics Program*). The legislation referred to here is the 1990 Education Act. However it now seems clear that the provision of an ethics based complement to SRE is consistent with the Act (which does not stipulate that non-SRE children are to be precluded from meaningful or ethical instruction), and that it is rather the DET's Implementation of Religious Education Policy that would require amendment.

The second action item calls for 'adequate training... provided by the Department of Education and Training to schools to implement the approved ethics program as an alternative to religious Education' (Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, *Submission on the Ethics Program*). The two items were renewed at the Federation's 2007 Annual Conference (Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, *Submission on the Ethics Program*).

In the 2006 Federation of P&C survey of affiliates referred to in Section 1.2, 59% of respondents indicated that the availability of a non-religious ethics based alternative to SRE was 'important' or 'very important' to them, while 18% reportedly saw it as 'unimportant' or 'very unimportant'. For the purposes of that question, 'ethics' was defined as 'generally agreed rules and/or standards for right (moral) conduct or practice' (Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, 2006 Survey of Affiliates, included in their *Submission on the Ethics Program*).

At the 2009 Conference, a further motion was passed with 'overwhelming' support calling for an ethics-based complement to SRE, and a proposed ten-week pilot ethics program focused on Year five and six students was proposed as a way forward, pending ministerial approval (Giblin 2009). In the same year, the St James Ethics Centre initiated broad-based community consultation. Views were sought from and endorsements given by individuals involved in youth mental health organizations, faith-based ministries, community organisations (for example, Human Rights Council of Australia, the Australian Government Primary Principals' Association), and education (principals and assistant principals) (St James Ethics Centre 2009).

Following this consultation, in September 2009 the St James Ethics Centre, in conjunction with the Federation of P&C, submitted a formal Request for Ministerial approval to proceed with the Pilot to the Hon. Verity Firth, NSW Minister for Education and Training (St James Ethics Centre 2009).

Both the Federation of P&C and the St James Ethics Centre have stated that their aim is not to undermine the teaching of SRE in NSW government schools. In their joint Request to the Minister, for example, they state that ‘The Centre fully respects the role of religious instruction in primary schools and the principle under which faith groups are asked to provide it’, stating further that ‘[a]n amendment to NSW Department of Education policy to allow for the provision of an ethics-based course would not adversely affect the rights of those who attend scripture’; rights which are enshrined in the NSW Education Act 1990, Sections 32 and 33. (St James Ethics Centre 2009, p.4; see also Federation of P&C media Release 9th June, 2010 and St James Ethics Centre Media Release 13th April, 2010)

This statement has been challenged by SRE providers, and their arguments will be considered in the following section of this report.

On 23rd November 2009, the then Premier Nathan Rees announced the approval of the pilot, to be targeted to Stage 3 students and to run over ten weeks in one school term. At the Federation’s 2010 Conference, approximately 90% of delegates voted in support of the ethics trial (Dianne Giblin, interview August 3rd, 2010).

In the following Chapter the implementation of the ethics course trial is examined.

SECTION 3

ORGANISATION OF THE ETHICS COURSE TRIAL

3.1 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ST JAMES ETHICS CENTRE AND ROLE OF THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The ethics course trial took place in Term 2, 2010, and responsibility for its organization and financial support lay with the St James Ethics Centre which, largely through the efforts of an appointed Pilot Project Coordinator, took on the tasks of sourcing a curriculum, recruiting schools and volunteer teachers, arranging a training session for volunteers, and maintaining a webspace which provided ongoing volunteer support from Professor Philip Cam ('Ethics Forum', www.ethics.org.au/ethics-forum/viewforum.php?f=7&sid=c0eb8271f9940a975f64bd83cc058d07). The Project Officer, Ms Teresa Russell, also provided direct ongoing administrative support and advice to volunteers through individual email, telephone and face-to-face communication. The DET oversaw the proper conduct of the trial as well as funded and provided operational support for the independent evaluation.

3.2 SELECTION OF SCHOOLS AND VOLUNTEERS

It was decided that the pilot would run in ten schools across metropolitan and country NSW. The schools were self selected, nominated by their Parents and Citizens' Associations. Approximately 530 students participated in the trial. The sample was considered large enough and sufficiently diverse to yield reliable pilot data. Information from the MySchool website and interviews with school principals bears out this claim, and further support can be found in Section 5 of this report. The schools involved were Crown Street and Darlinghurst (both inner city schools with diverse student populations), Haberfield and Leichhardt in Sydney's inner west, Randwick in Sydney's eastern suburbs, Baulkham Hills North in North West Sydney, Rozelle in the inner west, Ferncourt and Hurstville, in the southern suburbs and Bungendore, a rural school in a growing area, close to the ACT.

Volunteers were recruited from each school community, with the recruitment process managed by school principals in close consultation, on the whole, with Parents and Citizen's committee representatives who served as points of contact between the schools, the St James Ethics Centre and the volunteers. Through the Project Officer, the Centre devised a comprehensive volunteer recruitment

document describing the pilot, calling for expressions of interest and outlining selection criteria ('Ethics as a Complement to Scripture Pilot, Teacher Selection Criteria'). Applicants were required to complete an 'Expression of Interest' form and to write 50-200 words on why they wanted to be ethics teachers. Thirty three volunteers were recruited, to teach a total of 25 classes comprising 530 students in all.

More volunteers were selected than there were classes in order to cover illness and other unforeseen absences. In those schools with more volunteers than there were classes, the division of duties was left to the ethics teachers themselves. In most cases the volunteers chose co-facilitation. Two of the volunteers were DET teachers, and while this seemed to work to the advantage of the school involved, DET policy is that its teachers will not be involved in any further teaching of the ethics course (Mr Brian Elliott for the DET, Interview August 3rd, 2010). In terms of child protection, all participants were required to undertake an online Police Check through the Personnel Risk Management Group (prm.net.au), and to sign a Prohibited Employment Declaration, standard for all volunteers entering schools in NSW.

3.3 CURRICULUM AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING

The Centre engaged Associate Professor Philip Cam, an internationally recognized expert in ethical and more broadly philosophical inquiry with children, to develop a curriculum for the pilot and to design and facilitate a volunteer training program which was held over two full days, one week apart, at the offices of the NSW Federation of P&C Associations. The training program is discussed here, while the content and methodology of the curriculum is considered in Section 4.2.2 of this report.

The training program included a general introduction, some Q & A sessions, and a child protection session conducted by DET, but the focus was on the lessons the participants were to deliver in the classroom. Each lesson was run through in 'classroom mode', with Professor Cam as the facilitator. In each workshop session the lesson was prefaced by talk about the content and process of the lesson and the session was concluded with discussion about what occurred during engagement in the lesson (Professor Philip Cam, email correspondence 13th April, 2010).

The training sessions were also backed up by ongoing support. Professor Cam visited as many classrooms as possible over the 10 weeks of the trial, offering feedback on the lessons he observed. As indicated in Section 3.1, the initial training was complemented by access to a password protected

online space where the ethics volunteers and the curriculum developer were able to share experiences and discuss issues and problems throughout the trial, and volunteers' postings indicate that they found the online forum supportive.

In interviews conducted with volunteers from 8 of the 10 trial schools at around the midpoint of the trial, there was general consensus that the training was well structured and that the modelling or 'hands-on' approach employed in the training was very beneficial. Several volunteers also indicated that the training had prepared them well to deal with the course content and to understand and apply the reason-giving process required for delivery of the course content. While one volunteer claimed that the philosophical content component of the training was '...not so important as kids come with their own ideas' (Summary of main points, Section 5), at least 5 other volunteers expressed the view that the philosophical content of the training was very important and should be developed further to enable them to bring more depth to ethics lessons. It was noted by one volunteer that seemingly sophisticated concepts discussed during training had also, surprisingly, been raised by students.

The following suggestions for improvements to the training course were each made by a number of volunteers:

- Include opportunities for practice in leading sessions with peers on course topics in order to develop facilitation skills and have a sense of what might happen during discussion of topics; provide feedback to volunteers on their facilitation skills
- Include opportunities for observation of classroom-based ethics lessons
- Include a classroom/behaviour management component in training (this had been a challenging aspect of many volunteers' experience in delivering ethics classes); and
- Increase the level of online support (which one volunteer indicated had dropped off over the trial period).

As a general point we note that this form of training is generally regarded as best practice within the field, having been pioneered by Mathew Lipman over thirty years ago (Lipman 1985).

3.4 INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ETHICS COURSE: LETTER TO ALL STAGE 3 PILOT SCHOOL PARENTS

At the beginning of the 2010 school year, a letter (entitled 'Ethics Pilot information and Permission' and carrying St James Ethics Centre's letterhead) was sent to parents and carers of all Year 5 and 6 students attending the pilot schools, inviting those students' participation in the ethics classes. The letter was drafted after consultation with the DET and signed by the Pilot Project Officer, Ms Teresa Russell, on behalf of the St James Ethics Centre (Ms Teresa Russell, email correspondence 6th April 2010). The decision to invite participation from all Stage 3 students, rather than only those Stage 3 students who had in the past opted out of SRE, was made by the Centre, on advice from the Department of Education and Training. The decision was made on two distinct grounds. Firstly, parents have the right to make choices in full knowledge of the alternatives open to them. This is consistent with the requirement of the Implementation of Religious Education policy that all parents are informed each year about all persuasions offering SRE within a school.

In the terms of the policy:

3A 8: Parents/Caregivers are to be advised annually of the organization of SRE classes. This advice should inform the parents/caregivers of the religious persuasions that will be providing SRE for particular class or year groups;

3A 9: Parents are to be advised of any changed organization and the availability of any new SRE class.

(NSW Department of Education and Training last updated 2007)

Secondly, it was noted that the Department's view is that SRE is the default, that is, children will be placed in the appropriate SRE class when parents have indicated their religion on their child's enrolment forms. Where 'no religion' is recorded, they are placed in a non Scripture class. It was also recognised that parents can change their minds about SRE attendance at any time (Clause C1 of the Policy) and, it appears, to some extent do, so that to restrict the offer to parents of children opting out of SRE at one particular time would be inequitable. (Mr Brian Elliott, NSW Department of Education and Training, interview 3rd August, 2009)

It should also be noted that while the letter to parents/caregivers includes a provisional course outline, the Policy states that:

The school is not responsible for and should not disseminate details of lesson content for SRE, but may indicate the name and method of contacting the approved provider or their local representative (Clause 3A 16).

This seems unnecessarily restrictive, and it would seem desirable that parents be provided with information that will allow them to make a considered choice about their children's SRE attendance, without having to make personal contact with individual providers.

It is recommended that information about SRE curricula and other such courses at individual schools be made available to parents/careers in the form of fact sheets to mirror the DET fact sheets for parents on Gender or Drug education. The fact sheets should provide no more than a summary of the aims and processes of the different SRE offerings, and each summary should be no more than two paragraphs in length. It might be useful for the DET to design a template for this purpose.

3.4.1 CRITICISMS FROM SRE PROVIDERS

The decision to invite participation from all Stage 3 students in the pilot schools has generated controversy, with some religious groups criticising the decision on a number of different grounds. Some of the objections rest on matters of principle, while others ('process' objections) are criticisms of the decision making process employed by St James Ethics Centre and the DET. What follows is a summary and evaluation of the objections. The summary is based on discussion with members of the Director General's Consultative committee on Special Religious Education (3rd August, 2010), and submissions from the Baptist Union of New South Wales, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, the NSW Board of Jewish Education and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (joint submission), Presbyterian Youth, The Catholic Bishops of NSW and CCRESS (joint submission) and the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW). Firstly, the criticisms of process are considered.

Criticisms of process

The first of the process objections points to a lack of clarity in communication with SRE providers: the statement initially given to the churches (on 11th February, 2010) had indicated that the ethics course would be offered only to non-SRE students (more precisely, to only those students opting out of SRE at the time the invitation was circulated), and the reversal came in the absence of consultation with SRE providers. This is held up as one example of a general failure on the part of St James' Ethics Centre to communicate with faith groups, a failure which, it is claimed, not only caused distress to SRE

volunteers at the pilot schools, but also meant that SRE providers were unable to take into account the consequent reduction in class numbers when purchasing curriculum materials and organizing staffing.

The claims of this argument are clear and well supported, as is evidenced by an apology from the Minister's office through Paul Martin to the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education (Meeting of 3rd August). Concern on the part of religious groups over lack of consultation and dialogue in relation to the implementation of the ethics pilot run through many of the submissions received from these groups, and in some submissions is taken to signify a lack of respect for SRE providers.

A further issue raised in this regard is the faith groups' limited access to the pilot ethics curriculum. A number of religious groups had understood that they would be granted full access to the curriculum once it had been finalized. However this did not eventuate and seems not to have been intended, as is made clear in this entry on the St James' website:

St James Ethics Centre's commitment to provide access to all material relates to an approved course, not the 10-week pilot program. It would be irresponsible to make available for use any material that is being trialled for its suitability. Rather, the Centre has made available as much of the pilot material for information as it is possible to disclose, without infringing the author's copyright.

(St James Ethics Centre n.d.c.)

In line with copyright requirements, an overview of the content of each of the ten lessons and the full plan of two lessons were made available on the St James' website, but religious groups have argued that that this partial access to the curriculum, coupled with lack of any access to supporting materials, disadvantages them in attempting to comment on the course.

While understanding the importance of copyright considerations, it is regrettable that SRE providers were not able to access the full curriculum and any supporting documents that might have provided explanations and theoretical justification for the pedagogy and content of the ethics course. It has meant that in their submissions to this evaluation, these groups have had little background on which to base their appraisals of the course. These appraisals will be considered in Section 4.2.3.

While not wanting to diminish the importance of these and other claims about lack of consultation and dialogue, it must be noted that the ethics trial proceeded in what can only be described as an emotive and adversarial climate, and in such a climate it is difficult to distinguish cause and effect. It is clear however, that open rational dialogue, carried out in good faith by both religious groups and those involved in the ethics trial, would have benefited both SRE and ethics providers as well as students.

A further criticism of process voiced in three separate submissions rests on anecdotal evidence and involves the claim that the Centre's letter of invitation was not understood properly by some parents; that including the St James' letterhead on the information letter misled some parents into believing the ethics course to be a form of Christian teaching and that a translation for parents of non English speaking background was equally misleading (a single submission). These misunderstandings, it is claimed, might well explain the action of some parents in opting out of SRE courses and into ethics.

It is hard to assess the strength of the argument in the absence of further details (of, for example, how many parents were misled). Moreover, if sound, the argument can be used equally as an explanation for why some non-SRE parents failed to enrol their children in the ethics course. Data from pilot schools provided on request by the DET, indicate that approximately one third of non SRE students chose not to enrol in ethics and that approximately 170 of the 530 students enrolled in the ethics classes came from SRE.

Criticisms of principle

It is argued in two separate submissions that extending the invitation to take part in the ethics trial to children already attending SRE classes is at odds with the claim that the ethics course is not in competition with, but rather a complement to, SRE; a complement aimed at offering a meaningful option to non-SRE students.

The St James Ethics Centre has responded to this criticism by pointing to its undertaking to make available to faith groups for their use in scripture classes, 'all of the material that might be created as part of any program to develop an ethics-based course of study' (St James Ethics Centre, n.d.c.).

In assessing this exchange, a number of factors should be considered: the declared aims of the St James Ethics Centre and the Federation of P&C in proposing the ethics course; the effect of the decision to offer the ethics course to all students, as well as the principles on which the decision was based.

The principles underlying the decision are these: parents' rights to change their SRE preferences at any time and their right to make these choices in full knowledge of the alternatives open to them. These principles are moral principles and are enshrined in law. The effect of the decision was (as indicated earlier) that approximately 170 of the 530 students enrolled in the ethics classes came from SRE. This effect is either a by-product of respecting the above principles, or the effect of a bid to compete with SRE. As noted in Section 2.3.1, the representatives of the St James Ethics Centre have indicated that their aim is not to undermine the teaching of SRE in NSW government schools, stating that '[t]he Centre fully respects the role of religious instruction in primary schools and the principle under which faith groups are asked to provide it' (St James Ethics Centre n.d.c.). This claim, together with the Centre's offer to SRE providers of access to ethics learning materials, would appear to lend credibility to the conclusion that the movement from SRE to ethics classes was a by-product of respecting parents' rights. The alternative conclusion would follow only on the assumption that the Centre's claim and action were not made in good faith, and for this, independent evidence would be required.

3.5 TEACHING ARRANGEMENTS

Volunteers, P&C coordinators and principals of trial schools faced a number of challenges in the early weeks of the trial. These difficulties appear to have been quite outside the control of the St James Ethics Centre, and included a scarcity of teaching rooms (caused in part at least by Building the Education Revolution programs), last minute confusion over whether the trial would go ahead, unprecedented media attention and further last minute uncertainty about whether the first lesson was to include pre-testing. In addition there was controversy over the fact that two DET teachers were involved in the trial and further controversy over one of the lessons, with some schools deciding against teaching the Graffiti topic, and others choosing to go ahead with it. In some schools, communities were divided over the ethics pilot, with principals receiving angry and personal criticism. The fact that the lessons ran successfully during this period seems to point to strong commitment and good will on the part of all involved, as well as to the strength of the administrative support provided by the St James Ethics Centre. It is to be hoped that in any wider implementation of the ethics course, the Department of Education and Training would play a larger part in supporting the rollout, where this would include (but not be restricted to) supporting schools and principals where communities are divided; and further, that additional resources be provided to make this support possible.

3.6 FUTURE CONCERNS

A decision to rollout the ethics course more widely would raise crucial issues in relation to organization, management and funding. St James Ethics Centre paid all costs of running the pilot, and further roll- out would require significant financial and organizational resources in order to support a project orders of magnitude more complex than the ethics trial. The Centre has initiated discussions around such an eventuality, and initial planning ideas, based on a gradual roll out beginning with Years 5 and 6 students, are presented in the document 'Future Considerations: Ethics Programs as an option for Children Who Don't Attend Scripture Classes in NSW Public Schools', 2010 (Ms Teresa Russell, email, 7th July, 2010). The document suggests the creation of a new entity to oversee the delivery of the classes, with the provisional title 'Primary Ethics'. Work in this area has already begun with initial steps taken to form a sub-group of curriculum writers (email correspondence from Professor Philip Cam, 13th September, 2010). It is planned that the 'Primary Ethics' body would oversee:

curriculum development, using contracted or volunteer curriculum experts; a network of volunteer managers; administration of the program implementation (including payment); recruitment of ethics teachers; training of ethics teachers; information to and feedback from schools and parents; and all ICT related to curriculum or training.

(Email correspondence from Professor Philip Cam, 13th September, 2010)

The document canvases curriculum development options, ideas about the structure of Primary Ethics, training options, including provision of online training (in this regard pro-bono assistance has been forthcoming), sourcing of further pro-bono consultancies (again, some assurances appear to have already been given here), ideas about the recruitment, selection and retention of volunteers, and funding options and costings.

In terms of curriculum, the Centre has made it clear that:

Any material developed for an approved program of Special Ethics Education will be made available for use as a free, public good – accessible to all, including faith groups. Those developing this material will do so on the explicit understanding that the intellectual property will be secured for common use in service of a common good.

(St James Ethics Centre n.d.c)

This undertaking imposes a significant cost on the Centre. An option (not canvassed in the St James document) would be to approach retired philosophers who have expertise and an interest in the teaching of philosophy in schools, in relation to pro bono work. (In South Australia alone, there are at least three such individuals who regularly contribute on a pro bono basis to teacher professional development.)

The DET, through Mr Brian Elliott, has expressed a number of concerns about the management of a wider roll-out of the ethics course, derived in part from experience of the trial. These include concerns that additional responsibilities would fall to school principals and that additional and ongoing organisational input would be required from the Department (Interview 3rd August 2010). These concerns are well founded as indicated by the description in the previous section of challenges faced by school communities. Moreover, it seems clear that further responsibilities would be imposed by the need to ensure that approved providers meet the same high standards of probity required of providers of Special Religious Education. Religious organisations must seek the approval of the Minister before they can teach SRE in schools. Over one hundred providers are now registered, and applications are referred to the Minister by the DET. Over time, a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to SRE is likely to attract applications from any number of providers and these applications should be subject to the same approval process as applications from religious organisations. This imperative not only imposes a further impost on the DET, but raises issues in relation to approval criteria.

These criteria should include a provision to ensure that the curriculum content is bounded by the subject matter of the branch of Philosophy known variously as Ethics or Moral Philosophy. The criteria should be developed by a group of independent experts in the field, who might also be charged with the responsibility of reviewing applications from providers and making recommendations to the Minister. It is suggested that the composition of the group be at the discretion of the Minister, but that members could include experts in philosophical inquiry from institutions such as the School of History and Philosophy, University of New South Wales; the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, the University of Sydney; and the Philosophy in Schools Association of New South Wales, as well as a representative from the Department of Education and Training.

It is suggested further that in any wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to scripture, it be made clear that the term 'ethics-based' means 'based on Ethics as a branch of Philosophy', or equivalently, 'Moral Philosophy-based', and to this end that the ethics-based complement to SRE be described as a course in *philosophical ethics*, or equivalently, a *moral philosophy-based* course, or given some such name in order to make clear the boundaries of its content.

In addition it is suggested that a consultative committee be established to allow regular meetings between ethics providers, the DET and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern.

In summary then, it is recommended that in the event of a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to Special Religious Education:

a. the ethics-based complement to scripture be described as a course in philosophical ethics, or equivalently, a moral philosophy-based course, or given some such name in order to make clear the boundaries of its content;

b. a group of independent experts be established at the discretion of the Minister, to oversee

- i. the formulation of criteria to ensure that any ethics course conducted during Special Religious Education time has as its content the subject matter of Ethics as a branch of Philosophy, and against which applications for the provision of such courses could be considered; and*
- ii. the assessment of such applications, and subsequent recommendations to the Minister;*

c. that a consultative committee be established to allow regular meetings between ethics providers, the DET and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern.

While recognising the need for such administrative changes and the consequent demands on the Department of Education and Training, the strong and principled arguments for ethics as a complement to SRE would seem to necessitate that such changes be made and that the DET be adequately resourced to provide support to all parties, should a decision be made on the part of government to offer the ethics course more widely.

It is noted that the planning ideas put forward by the St James Ethics Centre are speculative. However, experience in the organisation of the ethics course trial, together with detailed preliminary plans, makes the St James Ethics Centre well placed to manage a wider and gradual roll-out of ethics as a complement to scripture. Should a decision be made to offer the ethics course more widely, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Training engage in dialogue with the St James Ethics Centre regarding the management of this roll-out.

SECTION 4

OVERVIEW AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TRIAL ETHICS COURSE

4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

As indicated earlier, the curriculum was developed by Associate Professor Philip Cam, School of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of New South Wales, and recognised internationally for his work in the field of philosophical and ethical inquiry for children.

4.1.1 THE SECULAR FRAMEWORK

Clearly, the overarching aim of the course is to 'provide a secular complement for the discussion of the ethical dimension of students' lives' (St James Ethics Centre n.d.d).

The secular framework for the course is provided by the discipline of Philosophy, and more particularly by the sub-discipline of Ethics. In the debate surrounding the ethics course pilot, the term 'ethics' has been used in a number of different senses, muddying discussion between proponents and critics. It is important then, to make clear the sense in which the term is used within the pilot ethics curriculum. As a branch of Philosophy, Ethics is concerned with the rational exploration of questions such as 'How ought one to live?' and 'How should we go about justifying our moral judgements?; more particularly, 'What principles should guide our ethical decision making?' and 'How are such principles to be justified?; 'Are there objective grounds on which to make ethical decisions?' and 'What makes an action or practice fair?'. In the West, such exploration dates back over two and a half thousand years, to Plato. Prominent contributions to the development of this body of thought have been made by Aristotle, St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Kant and John Stuart Mill, among many others.

Within modern Moral Philosophy there are a number of widely agreed upon basic tenets. The most fundamental of these is a commitment to rational processes of argument and justification. There is also widespread agreement on more specific ideas, for example, the notion that morality is grounded in suffering and wellbeing and the understanding that humans (and to varying extents other sentient beings) share common capacities for such suffering and well being, an understanding which delivers

the notion of 'equal human worth'. Other widely accepted views include a rejection of moral relativism. (See for example Cullity (2004) and Beebe (2010).)

In modern Moral Philosophy, such principles are widely held to form the basis of rational ethical decision making. It is concepts such as these that Professor Cam aims to introduce to children through his pilot curriculum. But more than this, he is concerned to encourage students to consider the way in which these fundamental ideas play out in the making of moral decisions, as well as the role of other factors, such as the circumstances in which an action is performed and the facts relevant to the issue⁶. From this it is clear that Professor Cam's curriculum is directed towards meeting the following four of goals set for the pilot course, *viz.*:

- introduc[ing] the language of ethics and in doing so... provid[ing] the tools to survey the values and principles we live by';
- develop[ing] the intellectual capacity and the personal attitudes needed for participating in ethical reflection and action;
- develop[ing] students' ability to identify the relevant stakeholders and thoroughly explore, among other things, the consequences of proposed resolutions to the ethical dilemmas which they are considering; and
- inspir[ing] an appreciation of virtues and ideals.

(St James Ethics Centre, n.d.d)

4.1.2 THE CURRICULUM: DETAILS

The curriculum consists of 10 lessons, each exploring either a particular ethical question (for example, 'What makes a practice or action fair or unfair?') or a feature of the ethical decision making process itself (for example, the use and nature of ethical principles). The lessons are built on a process of discussion-based ethical inquiry, in which students engage in dialogue around the relevant subject matter, guided both by questioning from the volunteer teacher and thought provoking teaching resources, designed for this purpose. It is intended that through such processes of ethical inquiry,

⁶ For example, when considering the moral rightness or wrongness of an act of lying, the judgement might well depend in part on the circumstances in which the liar finds herself (whether the lie is necessary to save a life, say); and deciding whether it is morally right to hunt and kill whales for food will involve coming to grips with scientific facts about both whale intelligence and the risk of endangering the survival of distinct whale species.

students will come to develop the abilities and dispositions to engage in ethical reflection and to formulate well founded ethical judgements. The emphasis on dialogue based ethical inquiry is directed towards meeting the remaining aims set out for the ethics pilot course, *viz.*:

- offer[ing] a secure, non-judgemental space to explore the question, "What ought one to do?";
- encourag[ing] an openness towards important personal and public issues and
- introduc[ing] dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues.

(St James Ethics Centre, n.d.d)

The topics introduced are Fairness, Lying, Ethical Principles, Graffiti, The Use and Abuse of Animals, Interfering with Nature, Virtues and Vices, Children's Rights and The Good Life. In addition, the first session is set aside for firstly, setting up the class, that is, explaining the topics the course will cover, how the classes will work, the discussion rules and the use of the Speaker's Ball (possession of which confers the right to speak), and secondly, a short discussion on an ethical issue to allow students to get used to the discussion rules and the use of the Speaker's Ball.

The curriculum materials outline each lesson's 'procedure' in detail, and as a series of discrete steps. A procedure common to a number of lessons involves the use of ethical scenarios which are transcribed onto cards and distributed, one to each group of two to three students. An example from the lesson on lying is this: *You know that the person asking you for help has often lied to you, so you decide to lie to them.* Students engage in discussion of their scenario within their group and then declare their position (for example, whether the scenario described is fair or unfair, more acceptable or less acceptable, right or wrong), by placing the card on an appropriately marked place on the floor. (Where there is disagreement within the group or where all members of the group are unsure how to judge their scenario, the card is placed separately, at a place marked by a question mark). Groups are then called upon to justify the placements of their cards; to give reasons for their decisions.

Members of the class then discuss the various placements and explore their disagreements. The role of the volunteer here, as well as working to establish appropriate speaking and listening behaviour, is to intervene when necessary 'to keep the discussion focussed...[and to] assist students to uncover any general conditions or considerations' that underlie the reasons that have been given (Cam 2010). Examples of such general considerations might include the idea that whether an action is right or wrong, fair or unfair, or morally better or worse depends on the circumstances in which the action was

performed, or on its consequences, or on how much suffering the action causes or how much good it brings (Cam 2010). (The examples are taken from observations of lessons at a number of different pilot schools. These observations are discussed in detail in the following section.) In the procedure for some sessions, suggestions are given as to questions volunteers might ask in order to encourage students to uncover some of these general principles. For example, in the procedure for Session 5, it is suggested that following the recording of reasons why certain kinds of graffiti are unacceptable or acceptable, the volunteer should raise the following two questions if time permits:

- Are there any circumstances in which graffiti is perfectly acceptable? If so, when is that and why?
- Are some forms of graffiti much worse than others? If so, which ones are they and why?

In later sessions, there is an increasing emphasis on not only providing reasons for ethical decisions, but also unearthing the principles underlying these reasons, and considering what to do when principles conflict; that is, deciding which principles are more important than others. For example, it is suggested that in Session 7, *Interfering with Nature*, the volunteer ends the lesson:

... with a general consideration of what makes it wrong to interfere with nature in the ways that the students take to be unacceptable, by comparing and contrasting various cases with one another.

(Cam 2010)

The volunteer is further advised to:

[w]ork with the students to distil general criteria for judging these things to be wrong, keeping track of the discussion on the board.

(Cam 2010)

The curriculum then, seems designed to enable students to build, gradually and systematically, an understanding of the principles underlying reasoned ethical decision making.

4.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE COURSE

The analysis begins with a consideration of the framework and methodology of the course, and proceeds with a detailed critique of aspects of the curriculum.

4.2.1 FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

As indicated in the previous section, the philosophical framework within which the course is situated is focused on the rational justification of ethical beliefs and actions; on the principles that underlie such justification. As such, the framework seems appropriate for a course that is to serve as a complement to the ethical component of SRE.

The dialogue-based ethical inquiry approach around which the lessons are built is based on a methodology developed by Mathew Lipman and known as the 'community of inquiry' approach (Lipman, 2003; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). Lipman describes participation in a community of inquiry as follows:

[Children] learn to cooperate with one another by building onto one another's ideas, by questioning each other's underlying assumptions, by suggesting alternatives when some among them find themselves blocked and frustrated, and by listening carefully and respectfully to the ways in which other people express how things appear to them.

(Lipman, 1985, p.37)

Dialogue-based ethical inquiry has been consistently well evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in developing ethical reasoning skills, and much of this research relates to Lipman's methodology (Lyle, 2008; Garcia et al., 2005). It appears then, that the ethical inquiry approach is well suited to the task of developing students' abilities and dispositions to engage in ethical reflection and to formulate well founded ethical judgements, and hence well suited to a course which is to serve as a complement to the ethical component of SRE.

In the next section a critique of the curriculum materials and resources Professor Cam has developed, and their use by volunteers in the pilot classrooms is given.

4.2.2 CURRICULUM MATERIALS AND RESOURCES: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The analysis is based on an examination of the materials and resources themselves, observations of their classroom use, and interviews with volunteer teachers and principals. Observations were made and interviews carried out in weeks 4 and 6 of the trial, and comprehensive summaries of the data gathered from these interviews can be found in Section 5 of this report.

The design of the lessons and the materials are considered together. According to Professor Cam, the lesson design (which as indicated, involved variations on a detailed set of procedures) was aimed at assisting volunteer teachers to come to grips with the processes of ethical inquiry (Email correspondence 13th April, 2010). Interviews with volunteers (Weeks 4 and 6 of Term 2, 2010) indicated that overwhelmingly, they found the lesson procedures helpful, and that, with some significant qualifications, the procedures themselves guided the lessons productively. The resources were evaluated positively, on the whole, although again important qualifications were expressed.

Classroom observation, as well as an analysis of the materials themselves has led to the conclusion that while fundamentally sound, the lesson procedures and resources require some modification if the goals of the ethics course are to be achieved. A detailed critique of the course materials, pointing both to strengths and to what are seen as limitations, follows.

Critique of course materials: strengths

There was general agreement among volunteers that on the whole the scenarios were age-appropriate and engaging for students. Volunteers commented favourably on the explicitness of lesson procedures and strongly endorsed the ethical inquiry approach. So too, did principals, with one principal suggesting that the method of questioning employed during the course could well be adopted more widely within the school. The content of the ethics course and the methodology employed to deliver it appeared to be well accepted by all principals, particularly in schools where thinking skills, philosophy or social-skills programs were already part of the curriculum. One principal reported that special needs children with Aspergers' syndrome or autism were benefiting from the ethics course by interacting socially within the ethics group at levels not seen before. This comment was echoed by a volunteer from a different school.

A number of volunteers found the lessons on 'Principles' and 'Virtues and Vices' hard to teach, perhaps because the topic matter was more abstract or perhaps because the lesson procedures diverged from the standard method. A number of volunteers also considered the *Graffiti* topic controversial, although those who did teach the lesson found it to work very well. Apart from this, volunteers found that the lesson topics and associated materials engaged the students and motivated them to form opinions on the ethical issues raised, as well as to think more deeply, to 'think things through', and to back up their opinions with reasons. Hearing different viewpoints expressed was thought to have generated respect for others' opinions. Classroom observations bear out these views. In each of the 17 lessons observed,

students appeared excited by the issues the scenarios raised, readily articulated their views and backed those views with reasons. The reasons given were invariably relevant, most often pointing either to consequences for those involved (in the form of harm, both immediate physical or mental harm (for example, pain or humiliation) and longer term, more general harm (for example, the extinction of a species), or to a principle, such as ‘we shouldn’t kill harmless creatures’ or ‘If we have to kill (pests, say, or animals for food) we should do so painlessly’ or ‘It’s not wrong to use animals for human purposes (for example as guide dogs) if it is good for both humans and animals’. However students’ reasoning was often hampered by lack of factual knowledge: for example, not understanding what bullfighting involves, or not knowing that cane toads are an introduced species, or what climate change is. The lessons in which students were asked to judge the degree of acceptability, rather than the rightness or wrongness of a practice were highly successful in encouraging students to consider circumstances (for example, killing whales is more acceptable ‘if you are on land without plants and animals to eat – a whale could feed a whole village’). Students also readily gave examples (for instance, in discussion about treatment of animals a student referred to a ‘dirty grey old area’ she knows that looks better now it is covered with colourful graffiti), and responded directly to each other, as in the following interchanges:

Example 1

Student 1: *‘We should place our card (Cutting down a forest to make paper pulp) in the middle (of the acceptable-not acceptable spectrum) because we need paper, but animals need trees.’*

Student 2: *‘It’s not just animals who need trees-humans also need oxygen.’*

Example 2

Student 1: *‘Killing rabbits is unacceptable because they are living things.’*

Student 2: *‘Do you eat meat?’*

In the lessons observed, volunteer questioning played an important role in stimulating children’s thinking and encouraging dialogue. Volunteers asked a great many procedural questions (such as ‘Does anyone want to respond’, ‘Can anyone add to what x has said?’, ‘Can you say that in another way?’ ‘What reasons do you have for that view?’, ‘Is your view similar to that of x?’), questions which encouraged students to engage in further exploration.

These observations, together with the reports from volunteers, seem to indicate that the implementation of the course had gone some way towards achieving the goals set for the ethics pilot, viz.:

- introduc[ing] the language of ethics and in doing so... provid[ing] the tools to survey the values and principles we live by’;
- develop[ing] the intellectual capacity and the personal attitudes needed for participating in ethical reflection and action;
- develop[ing] students' ability to identify the relevant stakeholders and thoroughly explore, among other things, the consequences of proposed resolutions to the ethical dilemmas which they are considering; and
- inspir[ing] an appreciation of virtues and ideals;
- offer[ing] a secure, non-judgemental space to explore the question, "What ought one to do?";
- encourag[ing] an openness towards important personal and public issues; and
- introduc[ing] dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues.

(St James Ethics Centre, n.d.d)

In addition, retention rates were available for 23 of the 25 classes and indicate that 2 of approximately 500 students withdrew from the Ethics Course during the term.

Critique of course materials: limitations

However the course, as it stands, has a number of limitations that restrict the depth of students’ thinking, and hence restrict the degree to which the course aims can be achieved. As indicated earlier, each lesson consists of a detailed procedure, set out as a series of steps. The number of steps varies from six to thirteen, depending on the lesson. In most lessons, all but the final one or two steps are directed at having students (in groups) consider a scenario, form an opinion on it, and provide reasons in support of that opinion. As already argued, this is a valuable process in that the ability to state an ethical position and to put forward a justification for it plays an important role in reasoned ethical decision making. But the fact that an individual has offered a justificatory claim does not mean that the justification is sound. Some attempts at justification are better than others. To deny this is to embrace the dangerous position of moral relativism, the idea that ‘anything goes’, the dangers of which are all too clear. Reasoned ethical decision making demands an examination of the reasons offered in

justification of ethical beliefs and actions; an examination which, within the philosophical framework described, must be carried out on the basis of tenets of the kind outlined in Section 4.1.1: the notion that morality is grounded in suffering and wellbeing and the understanding that humans (and to varying extents other sentient beings) share common capacities for such suffering and well being, together with a consideration of factors which need to be taken into account when employing these fundamental ideas in the making of moral decisions; factors such as the circumstances under which an action is performed and the facts relevant to the issue.

While within the ethics curriculum there is some attention paid to examining reasons offered, the attention seems slight, finding expression in one (or very occasionally) two procedural steps in a lesson outline. Given that these steps of necessity constitute the later stages of the lesson, there is also a danger that lack of time will mean that the process of evaluating reasons is omitted from the lesson altogether. This is in fact what happened in all but one of the lessons observed. The lessons are designed to run for 45 minutes, but it is estimated that those observed would have taken close to an hour to complete. This same point was made by principals, some of whom also appeared to have gained the impression from observing classes that there are 'no right and wrong answers' required in ethics, or, as another principal put it, that the ethics program place little emphasis on the development of a 'moral compass'. On top of this, most schools had scheduled SRE within a 30-minute time-slot. Volunteers themselves commented on the time constraints, noting that 'many things are skipped over due to time'. In the lessons observed, there was insufficient time to allow students to struggle through the formulations of the principles that were guiding their reasoning; rather the volunteer had little choice but to 'put words into their mouths'. There was also little time to encourage students to expand on their ideas, or to ask follow-up questions. There was unanimous agreement that it would be advantageous for each lesson to run over two weeks, which would also give students time to mull the issues over and investigate any factual questions which have arisen. *It is recommended that in any future iterations of this course:*

- a. *each topic be taught over two or more consecutive weeks; and*
- b. *in relation to this expanded time frame, that the curriculum materials be modified to include specific guidance in teaching for a process of reason evaluation.*

Time was not the only confounding factor here. Many of the volunteers saw their role as *solely* one of encouraging students to express their ideas and reasons in order that many different viewpoints come to be aired in the classroom or that students learn to disagree without anger. A number of volunteers also expressed the view that 'there are no right or wrong answers'. These misconceptions impose limitations on the course, and while recognising that the training sessions themselves were bound by

tight time constraints, it is recommended that in any future iteration of the course, the training program be extended, if not in duration then at least in content, to allow for a brief consideration of the issues around moral relativism.

A further point relates to volunteer questioning. As indicated above, in the classes observed, volunteers used procedural questions skilfully and effectively. But there is another kind of question which must be asked too, in order to encourage students to reflect upon and evaluate their beliefs and reasons. As well as procedural questions it is necessary to ask substantive follow up questions, in order to encourage students to consider important factors they have not thought of. It is important to note that such questions are not aimed at changing children's minds, but simply at encouraging them to look at all relevant factors. Here is an example:

Student (explaining why elephants shouldn't be hunted for their tusks): *'There will be less number of elephants.'*

Teacher: *'What if there were lots? Would it be OK then?'*

Student: *'Yes'*.

Sometimes students ask procedural questions of one another. Again, here is an example:

Student 1 (considering the question, 'Under what circumstances is it acceptable to interfere with nature?'): *'Only interfere if you have permission.'*

Student 2: *'What if someone said, 'You have permission to hunt gorillas'? It might be bad, so I'd just leave it alone'*

Very little substantive questioning was observed. This may have been the result of time pressure, or of a lack of confidence on the part of volunteers who were (rightly) concerned not to channel children's thinking in a particular direction. In any case, substantive questioning is a skill that develops as a result of practice, and *it is recommended that in any future training sessions, consideration be given to setting aside time for volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry sessions.* Again, the time constraints that operate here are acknowledged. A final point relates to volunteers' concerns about behaviour management and it is recommend that these concerns too, be taken into account in any future training programs. *In summary, it is recommended that in any future iteration of the course the training be extended in order:*

- a. *to allow for a consideration of the issues around moral relativism;*
- b. *to allow for volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry lessons within the training sessions;*
and
- c. *to include a greater focus on behaviour management techniques.*

4.2.3 CRITICISMS FROM RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In submissions to this evaluation, a number of faith groups have raised concerns about the course. Again, it seems unfortunate that documentation supporting and explicating both the philosophical framework within which the course sits and the 'ethical inquiry' pedagogy employed were not made available to the religious groups. Such information would have gone some way to allay fears that the course is based on moral relativism or mere values clarification and related worries that within an ethical inquiry approach peer pressure becomes the arbiter of moral worth. It can be seen how these impressions might have arisen from the curriculum material that was publicly available. In evaluating the course materials an effort has been made to consider the philosophical background and the pedagogical approach on which the course is based. The field of Moral Philosophy has a two and a half thousand- year history and a logically rigorous methodology; the ethical inquiry approach has been employed widely for three decades by philosophers concerned to introduce philosophy (including ethics and logic) to the broader community. These are philosophers who decry relativism.

The objection has also been raised that any ethics course should be based not on philosophical inquiry but on a set of commonly agreed upon moral principles. This is the approach of the DET's Values Education program which forms part of the compulsory curriculum in New South Wales public schools (NSW Department of Education and Training 2004) and the approach too, of the Howard Federal Government's Values Education Framework (Commonwealth of Australia 2005). This approach to values education is quite different from that employed in the pilot ethics course and might well have its merits, although that would have to be argued. But the common values approach is also subject to criticism, an illustration of which is the following critique from Dr. Peter Vardy⁷.

⁷ Dr Peter Vardy is Vice Principal of Heythrop College, the specialist Philosophy and Theology college at the University of London, one of the leading experts of religion and values education in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

The Australian Government [has] a list of values that ‘...include care and compassion, doing your best, fair go, honesty and trustworthiness, integrity, respect, tolerance and inclusion.But none of those are going to give us the academic rigour to engage with the complexity of today’s world. We live in an increasingly complicated world. Whether it’s genetics... [or] whether or not to fight a war, whether it’s globalization. And we need our kids to be involved with these issues at a level that goes beyond the superficial. And words like ‘tolerance’ we’re all meant to nod about but if we tolerate everything then the distinction between what is true or false, what is right and wrong, disappears’. (ABC Online 2005)

No doubt any proposed program of moral education is open to criticism, the ethics pilot program included. Some of these criticisms have been outline above. Any such program must be judged in large part by the outcomes it achieves. In the following section of this report a description is given of an empirical study designed to determine the outcomes of the ethics pilot course in relation to its aims.

SECTION 5

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section describes the research design employed to determine the effectiveness of the NSW Ethics Course Trial in relation to the following set of course aims:

- Provision of a secular complement for the discussion of the ethical dimension of students' lives;
- Offer a secure, non-judgemental space to explore the question, "What ought one to do?";
- Introduce the language of ethics and in doing so, to provide the tools to survey the values and principles we live by;
- Inspire an appreciation of virtues and ideals;
- Develop the intellectual capacity and the personal attitude needed for participating in ethical reflection and action;
- Encourage an openness towards important personal and public issues;
- Introduce dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues;
- Develop students' ability to identify the relevant stakeholders and thoroughly explore, among other things, the consequences of proposed resolutions to the ethical dilemmas which they are considering; and
- To deepen the ethical sense of future generations.

(St James, n.d.d)

Both quantitative and qualitative measures were employed in the mixed-method evaluation of the ethics course. As noted below, the empirical component is grounded in research from within the field of cognitive psychology which has resulted in the design of instruments and methods of statistical analysis proven effective in the collection and analyses of data relating to the processes of ethical reflection.

5.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.2.1 QUANTITATIVE PROJECT

The research project took the form of an intervention study implemented in 10 primary schools during Term 2, 2010. A pre- post-test instrument was used to capture a number of key aspects related to the capacity of students to engage in processes of ethical reflection and their willingness to do so. The statistical analysis of data obtained via this instrument was undertaken by a statistician experienced in the use of SPSS.

The Intervention Study

As indicated, the intervention took place over a 10 week period in all participating schools during the second term of the 2010 school year. During this period students participated in weekly ethics classes, between 25 and 35 minutes in length, facilitated by volunteer teachers trained in delivering the trial ethics course materials. As described in Section 4, the ethics course curriculum included ten topics ranging from 'Fairness' and 'Lying' to 'Ethical Principles' 'Intervening in Nature'. Each topic was supported by a lesson plan comprising questions and associated exercises and activities.

The Participants

The participants were 478 Stage 3 primary students attending 10 government schools across the metropolitan area of Sydney and 46 Stage 3 primary students attending a rural NSW school. The students' ages ranged from 9 - 12 years and they were situated in either a year 5 or year 6 class, or in a composite class.

The 10 participating schools varied in terms of geographical location. For example, Darlinghurst Public School is located in inner Sydney, Hurstville Public School in south Sydney, while Bungendore Public School is located in country NSW. There was also variation between schools in terms of socio-economic status. For example, Rozelle Public School served mainly middle to high-income families while Hurstville Public School served mainly low-income families who qualified for governmental financial assistance. While on the whole students across all schools were of Australian-European or Australian-Asian background, there were a number of schools where the proportion of Aboriginal Australian students was higher. For example 4% of Crown St Public School students are Indigenous. A breakdown of student numbers by school, gender and age is shown in the following tables.

Table 5.1 *Number of participants and participant gender across schools*

School	Number of Participants		Participants' Gender	
			Male	Female
Baulkham Hills North Public School	68	14.2%	44	24
Darlinghurst Public School	9	1.9%	3	6
Crown St Public School	25	5.2%	13	12
Bungendore Public School	46	9.6%	29	17
Hurstville Public School	107	22.4%	50	57
Rozelle Public School	57	11.9%	25	32
Ferncourt Public School	39	8.2%	21	18
Randwick Public School	45	9.4%	26	19
Leichhardt Public School	38	7.9%	16	22
Haberfield public School	44	9.2%	26	17
Total Number of Participants	478	100%	253	224

Table 5.2 *Participants' age across schools*

School	Participants' Age in Years				
	9 yrs	10 yrs	11yrs	12yrs	Total
Baulkham Hills North Public School	1	28	29	10	68
Darlinghurst Public School	0	5	4	0	9
Crown St Public School	1	5	16	3	25
Bungendore Public School	1	21	21	3	46
Hurstville Public School	14	84	9	0	107
Rozelle Public School	2	26	25	4	57
Ferncourt Public School	1	11	18	9	39
Randwick Public School	3	21	17	4	45
Leichhardt Public School	1	17	15	5	38
Haberfield public School	1	30	13	0	44
Total Number of Participants	25	248	167	38	478

The 33 volunteer teachers involved in the study attended a 2 day training programme held at the offices of the NSW Federation of P&C Associations and was delivered by Professor Philip Cam, expert in the field of philosophy in schools. The training programme was designed to familiarise volunteer teachers with the course materials and to introduce them to the dialogue-based teaching approach noted earlier in the report, which has been shown to promote discussion among peers (Lyle, 2008; Garcia-Moriyon, Rebollo & Colom (2005); Trickey & Topping, 2004).

The Procedure

The study began and concluded with participants (n=478) completing a specifically designed 4-page questionnaire comprising four separate sections (Appendix 2). The testing was administered by either the volunteer teachers or by school staff following procedural guidelines supplied by the research team (see Appendix 3 & 4). Approximately 10-15 was set aside for completion of questionnaires. Pre-testing of participants was carried out in an ethics course class during week 1 or week 2 of the course. In most cases post-testing of participants was administered during the final week of the course. However, in the case of three schools (Baulkham Hills North, Darlinghurst and Ferncourt), post-testing was not undertaken until at least eight weeks after completion of the course due to individual school circumstances.

The Instrument

Members of the research team designed a 4-page paper-and-pencil style questionnaire in order to gather data pertaining to various aspects of participants' capacity to engage in processes of ethical reflection and their willingness to do so (Appendix 2). The questionnaire is divided into four main parts, which are described below.

Part A

The first section invited participants to indicate their age and gender and to create an identification code so that pre-and-post tests could be matched.

Part B

As a means of evaluating the ethics Course aim to, 'Introduce the language of ethics', this section took the form of a straightforward measure designed to identify participants' familiarity with and

understanding of the term 'ethical issue', i.e. understanding that an issue is ethical in nature if it involves consideration of the affects an action will have on others. It was included in both the pre-and-post test to determine if participation in the intervention would affect any change in an individual's understanding of the term. Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought that the following six examples of everyday issues that children might think about were 'Ethical' or 'Not Ethical':

1. Working out whether lying to your friend is wrong
2. Thinking whether to have shorter showers to save water
3. Working out whether it is cruel to keep animals in zoos
4. Thinking about what you want to watch on T.V.
5. Deciding which sport to play this term
6. Deciding who to ask to your party

Items 1, 2 and 3 were included as clear examples of ethical issues. Items 4 and 5 were included as clear examples of 'Not Ethical' issues, based as they are on face value as simple matters of personal choice. Item 6, 'Deciding who to ask to your party', was included as a more complex example that might be classified as either 'Ethical' or 'Non Ethical' depending on participants' personal experiences. Student responses to Part B were entered into an SPSS file and the data were subjected to a range of statistical analyses.

Part C

As a means of evaluating the course aims to 'Encourage an openness towards important personal and public issues' and 'Introduce dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues' this section of the questionnaire focused on determining participants' attitude (or willingness) to engage in the processes of ethical reflection in the company of others. The 'Measure of Argumentativeness Scale' (Infante & Rancer, 1982) was adapted by an experienced member of the research team and the project's statistician in order to develop an age-appropriate scale that would identify participants' level of willingness to engage in discussions of ethical issues. The adapted measure, named the 'Approach-Avoidance' scale, was included in both the pre-and-post test to determine if participation in the intervention would affect any change in an individual's willingness to engage in discussions of ethical issues.

The 'Approach-Avoidance' scale consists of the following 12 statements designed to determine the extent to which participants avoid or approach engagement in discussion of ethical issues.

1. I worry that the people I am discussing an ethical issue with will form a bad impression of me.
2. I try my best to avoid discussing ethical issues with people who disagree about the issue.
- 3. I feel energetic and enthusiastic when I'm discussing an ethical issue with people who disagree about the issues.**
4. After discussing an ethical issue where people have disagreed I feel nervous and upset.
- 5. I enjoy a good discussion about an ethical issue with people who disagree about the issue.**
6. I get an unpleasant feeling when I'm about to get into a discussion of an ethical issue where people might disagree.
- 7. I enjoy defending my point of view on an ethical issue.**
- 8. I'm happy when I keep a disagreement on an ethical issue from happening.**
- 9. I consider discussing ethical issues with people who disagree to be an exciting challenge.**
10. I find myself unable to think of good points during a discussion about an ethical issue.
- 11. At the end of discussing an ethical issue with people who disagree I look forward to being part of another.**
- 12. I feel excited when I see that a conversation I'm in is leading to a discussion in which people disagree about an ethical issue.**

Items 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12 (highlighted in bold) reflect reasons to explain why an individual might be willing to engage in discussions of ethical issues, while items 1, 2, 4, 6 & 10 reflect reasons to explain why an individual might try to avoid engaging in such discussions.

Participants were asked to indicate the how often each statement is true for them on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Almost Never True' to 'Almost Always True'. Student responses to Part D were entered into an SPSS file and the data were subjected to a range of statistical analyses.

The findings from the intervention study are reported and discussed in the following section.

Part D

This part of the questionnaire was designed to examine a number of key aspects related to the capacity of students to engage in processes of ethical reflection and their willingness to do so, and draws on an extensive body of empirical research from within cognitive psychology that focuses on the development of logical and ethical reasoning skills and dispositions through engaging individuals in a process of dialogue-based ethical inquiry (Anderson, Chinn, Chang, Waggoner & Yi, 1997; Anderson, Chinn, Waggoner & Nguyen, 1998; Anderson, Nguyen-Jahiel, McNurlen, Archodidou, Kim, Reznitskaya, Tillmanns & Gilbert, 2001; Kuhn, Shaw & Felton, 1997; Felton & Kuhn, 2001; Schleifer, Neveu, Mayer, & Poissant, 1999).

In this section participants were introduced to a real-world ethical issue through a series of news headlines and a brief written scenario describing a series of shark attacks occurring at a local beach. The question of whether the suspected shark should be hunted and killed was raised within the text. Participants were then invited to indicate whether they thought the shark should be hunted and killed by circling one of three possible answers: 'Yes', 'No', or 'I don't know'. They were then asked to explain their answer by writing their reasons in the space provided. This process of eliciting children's views and justification on controversial issues in writing is widely employed among educators and researchers investigating the development of argument skills and dispositions (Kuhn & Udell, 2003; Reznitskaya, Anderson, McNurlen, Nguyen-Jahiel, Archodidou, & Kim, 2001).

In line with course aims 4, 5, 8 and 9, this task was included in the questionnaire to determine whether participation in the intervention would lead to an improvement in participants' capacity to engage in processes of ethical reflection and their willingness to do so.

More particularly, it was hypothesised that participation in the intervention would lead to a change in students' ability and willingness to:

- provide relevant reasons for their view (course aim 5);
- provide facts in support of their view (course aim 5);
- refer to virtues and ideals [or ethical principles] in support of their view (course aims 4 & 5);
- identify the relevant stakeholders within ethical dilemmas (course aim 5 & 8);
- explore consequences of proposed resolutions to ethical dilemmas (course aim 5 & 8) and;

- consider future generations when reflecting on ethical issues (course aim 9).

In addition and on the basis of research investigating the impact of engaging children in philosophical discussions on empathy (Schleifer, Peyronnet & Lecomte, 2003), it was also hypothesised that participation in the intervention would lead to an increase in students' ability and willingness to:

- provide expressions of empathy for relevant stakeholders within ethical dilemmas.

Following Reznitskaya and colleagues' (2001) approach to analysing children's written arguments, a coding system was developed by an experienced member of the research team in order to provide low-inference, quantitative measures of participants' capacity and attitude to engage in the aspects of ethical reflection noted above.

The coding system

- The number of relevant reasons offered in support of an individual's stance was counted.

Examples include: *'The shark should not be killed because the surfer was in its territory'; 'The shark should be killed because it is likely to kill other surfers in the area'*

Examples of reasons not counted as relevant include: *'Don't kill the shark because it is a movie star'; 'The shark must be killed because I'm so scared I dream about them'*

- The number of facts cited in support of an individual's stance was counted.

Examples include: *'It's in the shark's nature to protect its territory and hunt for food'; 'Shark nets can be used to protect people swimming'*

- Reference to an ethical principle was noted.

Examples include: *'It is wrong to kill living things'; 'Human life is always more important than animals'; 'Treat creatures like you want to be treated'*

- Reference to relevant stakeholders was noted.

Examples include: 'We have to think of other people who want to swim in the area and what about the tourists who won't come?'; 'The sharks might be an endangered species'

- Reference to consideration of consequences for proposed solutions was noted.

Examples include: 'Even if we tow the shark out to sea it might come back or another shark will be in the area anyway'; 'We could try to kill and hunt the shark but we won't know for sure if it's the one that killed the man so the problem won't be fixed'

- Reference to consideration of future generations was noted.

Examples include: 'It's not fair if children in the future can't see these magnificent creatures!'; 'If we kill an endangered shark the balance of the ocean will be upset and that will affect everyone forever'

- Reference to expressions of empathy for relevant stakeholders was noted.

Examples include: 'Sharks get hungry and have babies just like we do'; 'Sharks feel pain like humans, so it's cruel to hunt them'; 'I feel sorry for shops and café owners if people won't come to the beach anymore'

In addition, the total number of words in each protocol was counted and recorded.

Coding procedure and reliability on written protocols

The coding system was applied to a subset of data comprising approximately 75% of the total number of matched pre-test and post-test written protocol responses. Data from schools Baulkham Hills North, Darlinghurst and Ferncourt did not arrive until after the scoring was completed and was therefore omitted from this analysis.

Two members of the research team participated in the coding process following training provided by the developer of the coding scheme using a randomly chosen sample of written protocol responses constituting approximately 10% of the database. The remaining written protocols were divided equally

between the two raters who were blind to time of testing and school group. Overall coding reliability on the seven measures was assessed by having approximately one third of the written protocol responses re-coded by the developer of the coding system. Overall percentage agreement was 88%. Differences in initial ratings were then resolved through discussion between the raters and developer of the coding system.

Scored data were entered into as SPSS file and subjected to various statistical analyses, the findings of which are reported in the following section.

5.2.2 QUALITATIVE ACTIVITIES

Observations

General observations of students and volunteer teachers working together were made by two members of the research team during 17 ethics classes conducted in Weeks 4 and 6 of the trial. A summary of data gathered via detailed note-taking during observations is included in the Findings (Section 6).

Interview Groups

Small group discussions of between 2-6 volunteer teachers were facilitated by two members of the research team in 8 schools at the mid-point of the ethics course trial. The group discussions ranged in duration from 30-60 minutes. The following questions were raised to prompt discussion in the group:

- How are the ethics sessions going in general?
- How prepared and supported do you feel to teach the ethics course?
- Do you have suggestions for how you might have been better supported?
- How have you found the course content?
- Did the training adequately prepare you to teach the content/ facilitate discussions?
- What part of the training was most/least helpful?
- Do you have suggestions for how the training could be improved?
- How would you describe students' engagement in the discussions so far?
- What topics have captured students' interest?
- Have any topics not worked well?

Participants' responses were audio-taped/recorded in writing during the discussions, collated and analysed thematically by an experienced member of the research team. The findings are summarised in the following section.

Interviews

Eight principals from participating schools were interviewed individually by two members of the research team. Interviews lasted between 20 – 40 minutes. The general question, 'How would you describe your experience of participating in the ethics course trial?' was raised by the interviewers to initiate discussion, and the following prompting questions were raised if required to encourage responses:

- Have you encountered any problems in the running of the ethics sessions?
- Do you have any suggestions for improvements to the organisation or structure of the ethics sessions?
- Do you have any suggestions for how the ethics sessions could be made to work in schools?
- Has the controversy around the pilot program had any impact?
- Do you see a place in schools for an ethics course such as the one currently being piloted?
- What expectations do you have for the ethics course in terms of students' ethical understanding and development of reasoning skills?

Participants' responses were recorded in writing then collated and analysed thematically by an experienced member of the research team. The findings are summarised in Section 6.

SECTION 6

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: FINDINGS

6.1 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

As indicated in the previous section, Part B of the questionnaire was included to determine if participation in the intervention would affect any change in an individual's understanding of the term 'ethical issue'. Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought that six examples of everyday issues were 'Ethical' or 'Non Ethical'.

Ethics identification items

Complete data across the 2 occasions were furnished by 359 students although for some items (as shown in Table 5.3), data from several more students were available on an item-by-item basis.

Table 5.3 *Ethics identification across six target items*

Item type	<i>n</i>	Pre-test	Post-test	McNemar test	<i>p</i>
Ethics items					
1. Lying	370	312 (84%)	318 (86%)	.3	.58
4. Water	363	285 (78.5%)	318 (87.6%)	11.77	.001**
6. Zoo	364	224 (83%)	250 (92.6%)	14.8	.001**
Non-ethics					
2. TV	368	93 (25%)	51 (18%)	6.6	.01**
5. Sport	368	123 (33%)	87 (24%)	12.1	.001**
Filler item					
3. Party	363	162 (45%)	141 (39%)	3.67	.055

Note. The columns headed pre-test and post-test indicate number and percentages of students who endorsed each item as an ethical issue. The McNemar test coefficient is expressed as a chi-square value, indicating change

across the two occasions where ** indicates probability values of less than .01. The *n* varies across items slightly due to data missing for several students.

A composite ethical identification score was generated for each student in the following manner. Responses were scored as 'correct' when items 1, 4 and 6 were marked as 'ethical', and items 2 and 5 were marked as 'not ethical'. In this way, a student would obtain an ethics identification score between 0 and 5 on each occasion. The Pearson correlation between the two occasions was 0.29, and the Spearman rank correlation was 0.32. Complete data were available for 359 students (191 boys and 168 girls), with means of 3.87 at pre-test, and 4.24 at post-test. This level of change was found statistically significant using the paired *t*-test procedure, $t(358) = 5.0, p < .001$. It was ascertained that significant effects applied to both the positive items (1, 4, and 6) and non-ethics items (2 and 5) when tallied independently. The tallies exhibited negative skews due to relatively high levels of students scoring at the ceiling level of 5. Thus, a non-parametric sign test was also employed to investigate if change was evident across the two occasions. This yielded a *z*-score of 4.9, $p < .001$. Hence, scores on the ethical identification checklist clearly increased across the two time periods.

To gauge internal reliability, Cronbach's alpha was applied to the ethical identification scores, and was found to be .53 at pre-test and .51 at post-test. Of the 359 students who furnished complete data, 102 (28%) evidenced the ceiling score of 5 on pre-test, and this increased to 148 (41%) on the post-test.

It had been apparent that the timing of the post-test had varied across schools, with 3 schools administering the post-test a month after the treatment, whereas 7 schools had administered the post-test very close in time to the treatment. This factor was tested through a repeated measures ANOVA procedure using time (pre-test vs. post-test) as the repeated factor and post-test timing (school location) as a between subject factor. The overall effect for repeated measures was significant, $F(1, 357) = 21.5, p < .001$, consistent with the *t*-test and sign test results. However, the effect for timing of the post-test was not significant ($F < 1$), and this aspect did not interact with the repeated measures factor ($F < 1$). This suggests that the timing of administration of the post-test did not influence the findings.

Gender was also tested using the repeated measures procedure. The overall effect for gender was significant, $F(1, 358) = 6.8, p = .01$. The interaction effect was not significant. Thus, the data do not suggest the existence of gender differences in response to the programme. The effect for gender existed

due to girls' mean at pre-test level slightly higher than the boys' mean (4.0 vs. 3.7), and this trend continued on the post-test (4.3 vs. 4.16).

Age levels was also included as an independent factor in repeated measures ANOVA procedures. Four age levels were used (9, 10, 11 and 12 years). The overall effect was not significant ($F = 1.1$), and the interaction with timing also was not significant ($F < 1$). Students at the different ages did not respond differentially, and apparently responded to the programme in a similar manner, in terms of increasing their ethics identification scores.

Effect size for the programme was assessed using Cohen's d procedure for correlated samples (see http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Effect_size/Data_analysis_tutorial). The calculated effect size was .38 (95% CI .28 - .51).

This result suggests the impact of the programme on ethics identification scores was significant, but at a moderate rather than a strong impact level. In other words, following participation in the Ethics Course, students improved in their ability to distinguish between ethical and non-ethical issues. This finding indicates some progress has been made towards meeting the course aim of introducing students to the language of ethics and reflects a deepening of students' understanding of the nature of ethics and ethical issues.

Argument Approach-Avoidance Scale (AAS)

The Approach-Avoidance scale was included in the questionnaire as a means of identifying participants' willingness to engage collaboratively in the process of ethical reflection. The scale consists of 12 statements designed to determine the extent to which participants tend to avoid or approach engagement in discussion of ethical issues.

The AAS was completed by 410 students at Time 1, and these data were subjected to a factor analysis based on an oblimin rotation following on from a principal components analysis. Two clear factors emerged, correlating at -.13. The two factors represented approach and avoidance tendencies as consistent with expectations. The item loadings are shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 *Factor analysis on the Argument Approach Scale*

Factor 1: Approach tendency: Eigen 3.18, Alpha .76.		Loading
5	I enjoy a good discussion about an ethical issue with people who disagree about the issue	.77
11	At the end of discussing an ethical issue with people who disagree I look forward to being part of another	.75
9	I consider discussing ethical issues with people who disagree to be an exciting challenge	.74
12	I feel excited when I see that a conversation I'm in is leading to a discussion in which people disagree about an ethical issue	.60
3	I feel energetic and enthusiastic when I'm discussing an ethical issue with people who disagree about the issues	.59
7	I enjoy defending my point of view on an ethical issue	.59
Factor 2: Avoidance tendency: Eigen 1.92, Alpha .61.		
6	I get an unpleasant feeling when I'm about to get into a discussion of an ethical issue where people might disagree	.75
4	After discussing an ethical issue where people have disagreed I feel nervous and upset	.70
1	I worry that the people I am discussing an ethical issue with will form a bad impression of me	.66
2	I try my best to avoid discussing ethical issues with people who disagree about the issue	.49
10	I find myself unable to think of good points during a discussion about an ethical issue	.45
8	I'm happy when I keep a disagreement on an ethical issue from happening	.43

Notes. Participants were 410 students who had completed the AAS at Time 1. Loadings based upon oblimin structure matrix. The correlation between the 2 factors was -.13.

Items as defined by factor analyses were then aggregated to construct two scores: an approach score, and an avoidance score. This allowed scores to range between 6 and 30 in each instance. Internal

reliability coefficients (alpha) were acceptable and shown in Table 2. Reliability analyses revealed that all items contributed meaningfully to their respective tallies. It was possible to match complete data sets from Time 1 and Time 2, on both AAS scores for 306 students (167 boys and 139 girls), and the means are shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 *Mean and deviation scores on Approach Avoidance Scale for 306 students*

	Pre-test	Post-test	Paired <i>t</i>-test	<i>p</i>
Approach	19.14 (5.2)	21.4 (5.6)	7.7	<.01
Avoidance	14.35 (3.9)	12.5 (3.7)	8.1	<.01

It was apparent that both the approach and avoidance scores yielded remarkably normal data with skewness and kurtosis indices approaching zero.

It was apparent from paired *t*-tests (see Table 5.5) that after participating within the programme, students evidenced enhancements in their dispositional approach scores, and reductions in their avoidance tendencies. The finding that students were more willing to approach collaborative discussions of ethical issues and less likely to avoid engaging in such discussions following participation in the Ethics Course is pleasing and contributes towards meeting two key aims of the course: ‘encouraging an openness towards important personal and public issues’ and ‘introducing dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues’.

Separate repeated measures ANOVA procedures were then used to assess for possible effects attributable to gender, to timing of the post-test administration, and to age of participants. However, in this set of analyses, no significant main or interaction effects were found, besides the effects due to pre-test vs. post-test differences. The overall effect due to age was approaching significance ($p = .08$) in the case of the approach score, with the 12-year olds showing slightly higher scores (mean of 23.0 on post-test), but this cannot be seen as overall significant.

Scores on the approach and avoidance scales were correlated with the ethics identification tallies used in Part B. In general, these correlations approached zero and in no instance was a significant correlation obtained. In other words, advances in ethical discrimination appeared quite unrelated to changes in argument approach and avoidance tendencies.

Effect sizes for correlated samples were calculated. The effect size for enhancement in the approach score was found to be .62 (confidence limits .1 to 1.2). The effect size reflecting reduction in the avoidance score was .65 (confidence limits .2 to 1.0). These size sizes can be seen as moderate to strong.

Written responses

Part D of the questionnaire was designed to evaluate the effect of the intervention's dialogue-based ethical inquiry approach on the development of individuals' ethical reasoning skills.

It was possible to compare what the students had written on the two test occasions in terms of simple content analyses. In this manner it was possible to match the protocols from 281 students (144 boys and 137 girls). On the first occasion they wrote an average of 44.9 words, and this increased to 47.8 on the second occasion, a marginally significant increase, paired $t(280) = 1.79$, $p = .07$. However, in terms of the content analyses, there was little apparent change across the two time intervals. **The only significant change found reflected the number of ethical principles cited within the protocols. At the outset this trait was found in responses from 37 of the 281 students (13%), whereas on the post-test this level had increased to 57 students (20%).** See Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 *Content analyses*

	Attribute	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance (<i>p</i>)
1	Number of reasons	Mean 2.15	Mean 2.23	ns
2	Complexity of reasons	Mean 1.3	Mean 1.4	ns
3	Ethical principle present	13 %	20%	.014* (McNemar)
4	Empathy	29%	32%	ns
5	Facts	88%	87%	ns
6	Circumstances	3%	2%	ns
7	Consequences	27%	27%	ns
8	Examples/metaphors	7%	6%	ns
9	Word count	Mean 44.9	Mean 47.8	.07 (paired <i>t</i>)
10	Alternatives	16%	15%	ns
11	Instinct	52%	47%	ns
12	Extinction	18%	20%	ns
13	Human fault	11%	15%	ns
14	Same shark	11%	12%	ns
15	Protect humans	20%	15%	ns

Note: the percentage figures in this table reflect the percentage of students exhibiting the specific attribute out of the 281 students matched for both pre-test and post-test. In the case of such nominal statistics, McNemar tests were used to compare pre-test to post-test levels.

It is disappointing to find little apparent change in the ethical reasoning items across the two time intervals but the results are, in some ways, not surprising. As indicated in earlier sections, the effectiveness of the dialogue-based ‘community of inquiry’ approach in fostering ethical reasoning skills and disposition like those reflected in Table 5.6 has been well established. In the case of the current intervention, however, it seems that, due to severe time constraints, coupled with the volunteers’ lack of experience in raising substantive philosophical questions and facilitating whole class discussions, community of inquiry methodology was not widely employed in the trial of the ethics course.

The significant increase in the number of ethical principles cited in written protocols from time 1 to time 2 is nevertheless encouraging and reflective of the emphasis within course content on exploring and applying ethical principles when considering ethical issues. Moreover, students’ increased ability

and willingness to appeal to a principle when making ethical decisions reflects a deepening of their understanding that ethical decisions necessarily involve reference to general standards.

In general, gender differences were not noted in relation to citing specific attributes. However, the female students did exhibit a relatively greater volume of written response. The word count of girls was higher than that of boys. On the pre-test the mean difference in output was 52 vs. 38 words, and on post-test the mean difference was 54 vs. 42. Similarly, the number of reasons given was higher in the case of girls with means of 2.4 and 1.9 on pre-test, and 2.4 and 2.0 on post-test. In relation to these measures of response volume, ANOVA procedures indicated these gender effects were all significant.

Age level effects were not found in relation to the content analyses on the written protocols.

In summary, the impact of the Ethics Course on participants' *Ethics Identification Scores*, *Approach-Avoidance Scores* and citing of *Ethical Principles* in written protocols was significant. As such, it can be concluded that the programme has, in a relatively short space of time, been effective in achieving a number of the course aims. Moreover and impressively, the effects appear to have been sustained in participants who completed the post test more than two months after the completion of the Ethics Trial.

6.2 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Observations in Ethics Classes

Observations of interactions between students and volunteers were made during 17 Ethics classes at approximately the mid-point of the trial. Topics being taught varied from class to class but included 'Virtues and Vices', 'Animals: Use and Abuse'; 'Children's Rights'; 'Intervening in Nature' and 'Graffiti', providing a rich source of observational data.

While differences between classroom dynamics and volunteers' approaches were noted by the researchers, the purpose of the observations was to gather an overall picture of how delivery of the Ethics Course was being managed by volunteers and the extent to which the course aims were being met.

The following summary provides a snapshot of common themes arising from the data:

Delivery of the course materials

- All volunteers appeared to be enthusiastic about the content they were delivering
- All volunteers appeared knowledgeable and confident about the content of the topic they were delivering
- All volunteers introduced the topic content clearly
- While all volunteers raised the central ethical question of the topic, very few asked other more substantial ethical questions during the lesson
- Students in most classes raised relevant philosophical ideas or questions but only a very small number of the volunteers picked these issues up and developed them further
- Most volunteers missed the opportunity to highlight crucial distinctions that had been made by students
- Volunteers consistently ran out of time to deal with the content towards the end of the lesson and summarising/evaluation was therefore always undertaken in a rushed manner

Facilitation of the lessons

- All volunteers appeared to be comfortable and confident in their role as facilitator of the lessons and appeared to be enjoying their interactions with students
- On the whole the volunteers seemed to have an appropriate manner for facilitating ethical inquiry in a safe environment
- Some class groups were very challenging in relation to behaviour management issues
- To varying extents, all volunteers asked procedural questions (e.g. seeking clarification, asking for reasons or examples, making connections between ideas raised)
- Most volunteers were able to clearly summarise and paraphrase what had been said/the progress of the argument, though in a small number of cases volunteers misinterpreted students' comments and changed the meaning of the contribution
- There was considerable variation between classes in relation to the amount of whole-group discussion taking place. In two classes no whole-group discussion was evident.
- All volunteers seem genuinely concerned to let all students share their views with the group
- In two cases it was noted that the teacher took on the role of devil's advocate
- Management of lessons varied considerably in terms of set up of students (some in circles, some not; some put hand up, others just spoke, some passed a ball to the next speaker...)

Student contributions

- There was considerable variation between classes in relation to the proportion of students who contributed regularly, though all seemed engaged with the content
- Overall, students were keen to voice their opinions on the issues being discussed and to give reasons in support of them, but in many cases they appeared to lack relevant factual knowledge
- Most students appeared able to provide relevant examples/counter examples (e.g. in discussion about graffiti a student referred to a dirty grey old area she knows that looks better now it is covered in colourful graffiti; in discussion about treatment of animals a student referred to the fact that a cat doesn't necessarily eat the mouse it kills but instead gives it to its owner as a present)

Interviews with Volunteers

Small group discussions conducted with 30 volunteers from 8 of the participating schools yielded comprehensive feedback on the ethics course itself, the volunteers' experiences of the training program and teaching the course, and the volunteers' perceptions of students' levels of engagement and skill development during ethics classes.

Level of support from school community

Volunteers from 6 schools reported high levels of support for the ethics course and their contribution to it either from the principal, the teachers, or the parents (or a combination). It was also noted by volunteers from 2 of these schools that the teachers seemed very interested in the course. No volunteers expressed a view that they had not received adequate support from members of the school community

Training

Positives

There was general consensus across the groups that the training provided by Professor Philip Cam was well structured and that the modelling/ 'hands-on' approach employed in the training was very beneficial. Several teachers also indicated that the training had prepared them well to deal with the course content and to understand and apply the reason-giving process required for delivery of the course content. While one volunteer claimed that the philosophical content component of the training was '...not so important as kids come with their own ideas', at least 5 other volunteers from across the groups expressed the view that the philosophical content of the training was very important and should be developed further to enable them to bring more depth to ethics lessons. It was noted by one volunteer that seemingly sophisticated concepts discussed during training had also, surprisingly, been raised by students.

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions for improvements to the training course were made by volunteers from most of the groups:

- Include opportunities for practice in leading sessions with peers on course topics in order to develop facilitation skills and have a sense of what might happen during discussion of topics; provide feedback to volunteers on their facilitation skills
- Include opportunities for observation of classroom-based ethics lessons

- Include classroom/behaviour management component in training (this had been a challenging aspect of many volunteers' experience in delivering ethics classes)
- Increase the level of online support (which one volunteer indicated had dropped off over the trial period)

In addition, the following suggestions for improvements of the training course were made by at least one volunteer:

- Undertake training with smaller groups of volunteers
- Include more training in questioning techniques
- Include more training in how to conclude and evaluate sessions with students
- Include more 'question and answer' sessions in training

Course content

Positives

There was general agreement among volunteers about the course content, including the 'scenarios', which was considered to be age-appropriate and engaging for students. It was noted by a number of volunteers that the course content was explicit and included succinct instructions which were very helpful. The topics noted as being particularly successful were: graffiti, those to do with animals, and stealing. Two volunteers from different school sites commented that they noticed overlap between topic content emerging helpfully as the course developed.

Problems and suggestions

Most volunteers indicated that they needed more time to deal with each topic, that content could not be covered in a single short session and several suggested spreading each topic over two sessions. Volunteers found the 'ethical principles' and 'vices and virtues' topics difficult to manage and to meet the objectives. Two volunteers in different groups noted that the pictures in the course materials were not of good enough quality to reproduce and use in sessions. Volunteers from one group suggested the need to include resources to help develop students' background knowledge in relevant areas.

Volunteers' experiences

Positives

Volunteers across the groups expressed a sense of enjoyment at being involved in the ethics course trial and commented extensively on high levels of student engagement in class as a good reason to be involved. One volunteer noted receiving positive feedback from parents as a highlight.

Challenges

Many volunteers described personal challenges and questions arising from the experience of facilitating discussion of ethical issues with students including:

- How to tell if individuals are really listening
- How to interpret what students are saying / the need to ask for clarification
- Encouraging students to do most of the talking / trying not to talk too much or give own answers
- Working out the extent to which one's own values should be shared
- Thinking you know where discussions will lead but finding they go in different directions
- Acknowledging/accepting a range of different views among the student groups

Student engagement

Volunteers across the groups described high levels of student engagement in the ethics classes in the following ways: Students are excited, engaged with content, eager, motivated, want to participate/talk, keep talking about ethics after the session had finished. Several volunteers also noted that students' level of engagement developed over the duration of the trial.

Student skill development

Volunteers in all school sites also noted that students' skills and attitudes had developed over the course, specifically citing: their capability in treating each other respectfully; they became more confident to disagree with one another; their comfort level in discussing issues in a group increased; their understanding that issues are not black and white developed; improvements in reason giving, seeking evidence, social skills, listening skills, concentration levels, factual knowledge. Two volunteers from different school noted significant benefits for children with Aspergers' syndrome who were interacting with others in the group and contributing to discussion to a degree not previously seen.

Suggestions for improvement more generally

The following suggestions for improvements to delivery of the course were made by at least one volunteer:

- Providing opportunities to give feedback to teachers and parents about the work they are doing with students
- Providing dedicated space for ethics classes to avoid disruption to classrooms/loss of time
- The chance to work with others in co-facilitation of ethics classes
- Reducing class sizes in some cases

- Time included in classes for students to research and develop requisite factual/background knowledge
- Providing more ethics classes for children of all ages

Interviews with Principals

Interviews with eight principals from participating schools yielded disparate views about various aspects of the content and implementation of the ethics course trial, which are summarised below.

There was a general appreciation of volunteers' efforts among the principals interviewed and acknowledgement that the training provided was appropriate. While five of the principals interviewed reported high levels of interest and enthusiasm for the implementation of the ethics course trial among P&C committees and the school community more generally, with one noting no opposition at all to the trial, four principals reported at least some degree of anxiety and concern among members of the school community, particularly from individuals concerned about the impact of the trial on SRE education. In most cases, the disquiet was attributed to the highly controversial nature of the trial and the resulting intense media attention. Two principals conveyed that concerns within the parent community were gradually allayed as the course progressed and was discussed informally by participating students and volunteers. One principal, however, reported polarised and emotive views among the parent community, and had received extensive verbal and written feedback, some personal in nature, from individuals opposing the trial. This principal also noted a lack of support to help manage the negative reaction.

Both the content and methodology of the ethics course appeared to be well-accepted by all principals, particularly in schools where thinking skills, philosophy or social-skills programs were already part of the curriculum. Several principals noted that the course seemed to be engaging for students and one suggested the method of questioning employed during the course could be adopted more widely within the school. One principal reported that special needs children, with Aspergers' syndrome or autism, were benefiting from the ethics course by interacting socially within the ethics group at levels not seen before. The view that the course should place more emphasis on the development of a 'moral compass', noting that this would bring it closer in line with religious education courses, was expressed by a different principal, while another expressed concern that there are 'no right and wrong answers' required in ethics course classes. Several principals suggested that lesson time is too short to deal effectively with the weekly course content and pragmatic problems relating to lack of space and the need to set up rooms to accommodate the ethics course were also highlighted during three

interviews. In two cases, principals recommended the inclusion of behaviour management skills in any future training for volunteers.

SECTION 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Should the decision be made to offer an ethics-based complement to SRE more widely, it is recommended that the trial ethics course evaluated in this report be adopted, subject to qualifications expressed in Recommendations 2 and 3.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That in any future iterations of this course:

- a. each topic be taught over two or more consecutive weeks; and*
- b. in relation to this expanded time frame, that the curriculum materials be modified to include specific guidance in teaching for a process of reason- evaluation.*

RECOMMENDATION 3

That in any future iteration of the course, training be extended in order to allow for:

- a. a consideration of the issues around moral relativism;*
- b. an opportunity for volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry lessons within the training sessions; and*
- c. a greater focus on behaviour management techniques.*

RECOMMENDATION 4

Should a decision be made to offer the ethics course more widely across the state, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Training engage in dialogue with the St James Ethics Centre regarding the management of this roll-out.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That in the event of a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to Special Religious Education:

- a. the ethics-based complement to scripture be described as a course in philosophical ethics, or equivalently, a moral philosophy-based course, or given some such name in order to make clear the boundaries of its content;*
- b. a group of independent experts be established at the discretion of the Minister, to oversee:
 - i. the formulation of criteria to ensure that any ethics course conducted during Special Religious Education time has as its content the subject matter of Ethics as a branch of Philosophy, and against which applications for the provision of such courses could be considered; and*
 - ii. the assessment of such applications, and subsequent recommendations to the Minister;**
- c. that a consultative committee be established to allow regular meetings between ethics providers, the DET and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern.*

RECOMMENDATION 6

That information about SRE curricula and other such courses at individual schools be made available to parents/carers in the form of fact sheets to mirror the DET fact sheets for parents on Gender or Drug education. The fact sheets should provide no more than a summary of the aims and processes of the different SRE offerings, and each summary should be no more than two paragraphs in length. It might be useful for the DET to design a template for this purpose.

SECTION 8

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this evaluation has been to consider the extent to which the ten-week ethics course described in this report has been successful. The course has been put forward by St James Ethics Centre as a complement to Special Religious Education. It is hoped that the information provided in response to the evaluation's Terms of Reference will serve to inform forthcoming decisions about whether this course should be offered more widely.

The findings of the evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the course in relation to improving students' understanding and skills in ethical decision making, and the overall appropriateness of the course content, activities and resources and of the associated training. The evaluation also points to the success of the organisational model employed by the St James Ethics Centre, and considers the viability of this model for wider implementation of the course in NSW government schools.

Within the Education Acts of all Australian States there is provision for some form of special religious education. In all states too, the Acts provide parents with the opportunity to withdraw their children from SRE classes, but it appears that no state implements a structured program of learning for non-SRE students. However a wider search of the religious education policies of other western governments reveals that the idea of offering an ethics based alternative to SRE is not new. Germany serves as a useful model here⁸.

In accordance with the German Federal Constitution (the "Basic Law", Article 7, Clause 3), Religious Instruction forms part of the regular curriculum of state schools in most German *Länder*⁹, and (Clause 2) parents and guardians have the right to decide whether their children are to attend religious instruction classes (Füssel 1999).

⁸ Thanks are due to Alison Collins for her assistance with translation from the German.

⁹ As Füssel (1999) notes, because of the so-called 'Bremen clause', there are some *Länder* (viz. Berlin, Bremen and Brandenburg), to which this rule does not apply.

Religious Instruction is taught 'in accordance with the doctrine of the Religious community involved', and so in practice, by representatives of approved religious persuasions (Clause 3, *ibid.*, Füssel 1999).

Where a choice is made not to take Religious Instruction, students are offered a course in Ethics, variously called 'Ethics', 'Values and Norms', or 'Philosophy', amongst other titles. Despite differences of title, and to varying degrees, of content, these courses share a common aim, namely to develop an understanding of socially important moral values and norms and to enable students to think critically and act reasonably and responsibly (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany 2008.) In most *Länder* this course is now compulsory for non-Religious Instruction students (Füssel 1999). Ethics courses have been offered to non- Religious Instruction students since the mid- nineteen eighties in many *Länder*, in a country where a large majority of citizens claim to hold religious beliefs. In the 2007 International Religious Freedom Report, it is estimated that one-quarter of the German population either have no religious affiliation or belong to unrecorded religious organizations (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2007). This is in comparison to the 31% of Australians who indicated either 'no religion' or failed to adequately describe a religious affiliation in the 2006 census (ABS 2008).

The call for a secular ethics-based complement to SRE in NSW schools is not without precedent, and there is evidence here that secular ethics and SRE can exist respectfully side by side. In this evaluation an attempt has been made to assess the extent to which the ten week ethics pilot provides an appropriate model for an ethics-based complement to Scripture, and to do so on the basis of rational argument and empirical evidence. Further decisions rest with the Minister.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

- Brian Elliot on behalf of the NSW Department of Education and Training: interview, 3rd August, 2010.
- St James Ethics Centre, (written submission) *Future Considerations: Ethics Programs as an option for Children Who Don't Attend Scripture Classes in NSW Public Schools, 2010.*
- Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales (Federation of P&F), (written submission) *Submission on the Ethics Program*, and interview with Dianne Giblin, 3rd August, 2010. Included in written submission was: *Position Paper 1: Special Religious Education (2008)*, and *E-Bulletin, 29th September 2009, Edition 42.*
- Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools, NSW
- Baptist Union of New South Wales
- The Anglican Diocese of Sydney
- The NSW Board of Jewish Education and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (joint submission)
- Presbyterian Youth
- The Catholic Bishops of NSW and CCRESS (joint submission)
- Bill White (volunteer teacher): *The First Day.*

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

THINKING ABOUT ETHICAL ISSUES

In the following pages you are asked to think about ethical issues (A similar set of questions was asked earlier on this term.) So that we can match your answers here with the answers you have already given, we need a code to identify you. Follow the steps below to create your identification code.

Identification Code

Student participant	S			
First 2 letters of your last name (your surname)				
Day and month of birthday e.g. 12 th of March = 12 03				
School code (<i>your teacher will tell you this</i>)				

So we know a little bit about you, please tick the appropriate boxes below.

Which are you?

Male Female

How old are you?

9 years old 10 years old 11 years old 12 years old

Please indicate whether you think that each of the following 6 issues
is or is not an **ethical** issue.

- **Working out whether lying to your friend is wrong** Ethical Not Ethical
- **Thinking about what you want to watch on T.V.** Ethical Not Ethical
- **Deciding who to ask to your party** Ethical Not Ethical
- **Thinking whether to have shorter showers to save water** Ethical Not Ethical
- **Deciding which sport to play this term** Ethical Not Ethical
- **Working out whether it is cruel to keep animals in zoos** Ethical Not Ethical

Shark attacked 'like freight train'

A SYDNEY father attacked by a shark on the northern beaches has spoken about the ordeal that not only endangered his life but that of his son.



Shark attacks waist-deep female surfer at North Broulee Beach

Shark attacks, and NSW has its second amazing escape in a fortnight

NSW: Shark closed popular beach at Jervis Bay

Shark attacks in NSW now at record numbers



SYDNEY, Australia -- A 35-year-old man has had a harrowing encounter with a shark while paddling a kayak in the harbor waters just a few kilometers west of downtown Sydney.

Discussing ethical issues

When people discuss ethical issues, such as whether a dangerous shark should be killed, they often disagree with each other. Some people are keener to discuss ethical issues than others. Some people try to avoid such discussions altogether. Look at the statements below and decide how often each statement is true for you. Please circle the appropriate number.

Statements	Almost Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1. I worry that the people I am discussing an ethical issue with will form a bad impression of me.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I try my best to avoid discussing ethical issues with people who disagree about the issue.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel energetic and enthusiastic when I'm discussing an ethical issue with people who disagree about the issue.	1	2	3	4	5
4. After discussing an ethical issue where people have disagreed I feel nervous and upset.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I enjoy a good discussion about an ethical issue with people who disagree about the issue.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I get an unpleasant feeling when I'm about to get into a discussion of an ethical issue where people might disagree.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I enjoy defending my point of view on an ethical issue.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I'm happy when I keep a disagreement on an ethical issue from happening.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I consider discussing ethical issues with people who disagree to be an exciting challenge.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I find myself unable to think of good points during a discussion about an ethical issue.	1	2	3	4	5
11. At the end of discussing an ethical issue with people who disagree I look forward being part of another.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel excited when I see that a conversation I'm in is leading to a discussion in which people disagree about an ethical issue.	1	2	3	4	5

THANKYOU FOR FILLING IN THE SURVEY

APPENDIX 3

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DISTRIBUTING AND COLLECTING QUESTIONNAIRE

NSW Pilot Ethics Course Evaluation – Student Pre & Post-test Instrument

Information regarding administration of surveys

This instrument is the pre-test questionnaire for students participating in the Ethics Course Pilot. Students will be invited to provide a written response to an ethical problem and also to respond to a scale relating to how they feel about engaging in discussions about ethical issues.

It is anticipated that the questionnaire will take students 15 minutes to complete.

Guidelines for administration of surveys

While handing out questionnaires – Please tell the students that:

- this is not a test but just a task to find out about their thinking;
- their responses will be anonymous; they will not be identified;
- the survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete;

Page 1 – Please help students as much as necessary here. First ask students to fill in the identification code as instructed. Each school's code can be found in the table below:

School Name	School Code (for identification purposes)
Baulkham Hills North	01
Darlinghurst	02
Crown Street	03
Bungendore	04
Hurstville	05
Rozelle	06
Ferncourt	07
Randwick	08
Leichhardt	09
Haberfield	10

Next, please ask students to respond to the questions about gender, age and ethical issues by ticking the appropriate boxes.

Page 2 – Please invite the students to view the news headlines and photographs about shark attacks on page 2.

Page 3 – Please read the scenario on page 3 to the whole class and then encourage students to decide on their individual stance on the ethical issue and circle the appropriate response. Next, please read the instructions on the top of page 3 asking students to explain the reasons for their position on the issue as carefully and clearly as possible.

Page 4 – Please read class the instructions on the top of page 4 to the whole class and then encourage students to respond to each statement in turn. If students have difficulty in comprehending a statement please try to help them, perhaps by re-wording the statement.

Once surveys have been completed, please thank all students for their time and effort.

Please hand in surveys to your participating school.

APPENDIX 4

LETTER TO VOLUNTEERS TEACHERS

Volunteers, Ethics Pilot Project, NSW

Dear Volunteers,

I am writing to introduce myself as the person responsible for the independent evaluation of the Ethics pilot programme and to explain the evaluation processes which I and my colleagues plan to implement over course of the programme. As you might know, DET has commissioned the evaluation in order to draw evidence-based conclusions about the effectiveness of the course in developing students' moral reasoning, and about the practicality of the organisational model on which the trial is based. The data gathered will inform a decision about the viability of implementing the Ethics course more widely in NSW government schools.

For the past 20 years or so I have been involved with the theory and practice of teaching moral reasoning to children. My work utilises a community of inquiry approach, in which students are encouraged to discover the skills of moral reasoning for themselves, in the process of discussing ethical issue that matter to them. The project in which you are engaged seems to me both exciting and important, and I look forward very much to discussing with you (either face-to face or in some other way) your classroom experiences. In addition, I will be inviting you to complete a short survey designed to capture your perceptions of the effectiveness of the training and support programme, the challenges (in relation to content and pedagogy) of delivering the course and the benefits that accrued to students, as well as your an recommendations for modifications in future Ethics courses.

In relation to the students you will be working with, in Week 1 (or 2 – to be advised) & again in Week 10 of the trial, I am seeking your help to administer a short survey consisting of two tasks. The first involves taking a position on an ethical dilemma and justifying that stance in writing. The second component of the survey relates to students' readiness to engage in

discussion of ethical issues. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Also, in Weeks 3, 6 & 9 of the trial, it would be helpful if you could ask students to complete a very brief self/group evaluation checklist in the last couple of minutes of class time.

I appreciate very much your help with the evaluation. I am forwarding a set of guidelines for the administration of the survey as it is important that the administration take place in the same way in all participating schools. Class copies of the survey will be made available by your participating school. Copies of the checklist will be forwarded to you in due course and I trust it will not be too onerous for you to distribute and collect them at the end of lessons in Weeks 3, 6 & 9. Arrangements will be made for you to hand over surveys and checklists to your participating school.

Thank you once again for your contribution to the project and its evaluation,

Sue Knight