All About MeE:
The Fair Go Program's
Student Engagement Framework

Geoff Munns has been involved as a researcher in all aspects of the Fair Go Program since its inception, when a research partnership was formed with the Department's Priority Schools Program to consider what works for students and their teachers in schools in Sydney's South West. His publications over the 20 years have been across all the Fair Go projects, and have primarily focused on the development and implementation of the student engagement framework in schools serving low SES communities. Here he has worked closely with teachers, academics and students, and has highly valued listening to and sharing their ideas. This article gives a brief introduction to the background and ideas behind the program's MeE Framework, as a guide to understanding how it has been important for the work described in all the articles in this edition.

The articles in this Special Edition of the journal refer, directly or indirectly, to the *MeE Framework*. As explained in Katina Zammit's history of *Fair Go* in this edition, this framework has been central to the research and associated teaching changes carried out under the *Fair Go Program* over its 21 years.

Small 'e' and big 'E' engagement" the 'eE' of the *MeE Framework*

A good place to start in understanding the *MeE Framework* is to go back to the earliest days of the research. When we set off to think about what would work in classrooms in low-Socio-Economic Status (SES) communities, we formed co-teaching and co-researching partnerships between academics and teachers in a number of schools in Sydney's South West. These partnerships were supported by the Department's Priority Schools Program. As the partnerships and projects developed, we began to observe that students were developing more positive relationships with their classrooms. Where previously there were patterns of opposition to challenging tasks, there was a 'buzz' around taking on hard work. Where compliance in low-level tasks was once the default classroom position, there was now a clear and palpable sense that students were becoming more engaged and eager to take risks in their learning. We talked about students being 'in-task' (positively involved in their learning) as opposed to being 'on-task' (just complying with teacher instructions).

As we thought about what was common across these classroom changes, it was agreed that they all shared important teaching and learning perspectives. These 'engaging pedagogies' had all been designed to encourage high-cognitive, high-affective and high operative responses from students – 'thinking hard', 'feeling good', 'working to become better learners'. There were also observations that the engagement was as much about the 'playing out' in the classroom as the design of learning experiences. That is, if students were to become engaged in their learning, they all needed to see themselves as important members of the learning community, and to be recognised as all having important roles to play for the benefit of everybody in the classroom. They had to become 'insiders'.

Another level of analysis suggested that four interrelated components were being used by teachers to develop what we termed 'the insider classroom', comprising a` student community of reflection, teacher inclusive conversations, student self-assessment, and teacher feedback. Now while each of these would be present in many classrooms, the *Fair Go* research proposed that there needed to be a particular shape to these processes to support the engagement project. This shaping can be seen below, where dot points

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represent the overriding idea (first dot point), the teacher focus (second dot point) and the classroom movement (third dot point) in each case.

Student community of reflection

- A conscious environment of cooperative sharing of ideas and processes about learning.
- Focus on substantive conversations encouraging student control and voice.
- Movement away from compliance as a way of students responding to task completion and evaluation and towards shared ownership over all aspects of the learning experiences.

Teacher inclusive conversations

- Emphasis on sharing power with students; visibility that encourages sharing of classroom culture; promotion of thinking and opportunities for students to interact and share processes of learning.
- Focus on learning, not behaviour.
- Movement towards conversations about learning (shared, mutual, reciprocal).

Student self-assessment

- Continuous opportunities for students to think about and express ideas about the processes of their learning.
- Focus on cognitive, affective and operative aspects of learning and towards deeper levels of reflection.
- Movement away from teacher as sole judge and towards students taking more responsibility for evaluation of learning.

Teacher feedback

- Awareness of the power of written, oral and symbolic feedback on students' self- concept as learners.
- Focus on staged process: 1. the task (talking explicitly about achievement and what students have done that is right or wrong); 2. processes (helping students acquire processes and better ways of doing tasks); 3. self-regulation (encouraging effort and confidence and helping students to stay committed to the learning experiences).
- Movement away from generalised and unrelated feedback towards feedback tied to investing more effort, more attention, or more confidence, into the task being undertaken.

The first part of the *Fair Go* student engagement framework was labelled small 'e' engagement. This is the 'e' of the *MeE Framework*, and is depicted in this diagram below. The planned experiences are in the centre circle; the insider classroom processes shown in the outer circle.

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From this point the *Fair Go Program* then argued (drawing on research by Willis, 1977, and Bernstein, 1996) that, in concert, these small 'e' experiences and processes could send powerful messages to students that would encourage them to have a greater sense that school was a place that 'worked' for them, and education was a valuable resource that they could use now and into the future. This was the big 'E' engagement of the *MeE Framework* – 'school is for me'. The messages were seen to be carried across what we termed 'discourses of power': *knowledge, ability, control, place,* and *voice.* Key ideas from the inner and outer circle of the 'e', then became elaborated as shown in the table below.

knowledge	'We can see the connection and the meaning' – reflectively constructed access to contextualized and powerful knowledge
ability	'I am capable' – feelings of being able to achieve and a spiral of high expectations and aspirations
control	'We do this together' – sharing of classroom time and space; interdependence, mutuality and power *with*
place	'It's great to be a kid from …' – being valued as an individual and learner and feelings of belonging and ownership over learning
voice	'We share' – enjoying an environment of discussion and reflection about learning with students and teachers playing reciprocal meaningful roles

Motivation: the 'M' of the *MeE Framework*

The final piece of the framework came about when we became increasingly aware that, despite the whole classroom pedagogical changes, there were still students who were falling 'through the cracks'. Some still needed additional support and encouragement to take on board the small 'e' learning experiences being implemented in their classroom. A collaboration with Andrew Martin (then Western Sydney University, and later Sydney University and the University of New South Wales) helped us to understand the

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individual processes around what motivated students. His 'Motivation and and Engagement Wheel' (Martin, 2007, 2009) drew on research to highlight what helped and what got in the way of motivation, and these ideas were added to complete the *MeE Framework*. What helped was labelled 'adaptive' motivation, and consisted of *self-efficacy, mastery orientation, valuing, persistence, planning,* and *task management*. What got in the way of motivation was called 'impeding' and 'maladaptive' motivation, comprised of *anxiety, failure avoidance, uncertain control, self-handicapping* and *disengagement*. Key teaching questions for teachers coming out of these positive and negative processes around individual motivation are listed below, with the 'adaptive', 'impeding' and 'maladaptive' labels indicated in brackets.

- What support is there for each student to develop a belief and confidence in their own ability to succeed at school, overcome challenges and perform at their best (self-efficacy)?
- What individual encouragement is there for each student to focus on their own learning, solving problems and developing skills (mastery orientation)?
- How is each student helped to see that school is useful, important and relevant (valuing school)?
- Is there pedagogy that promotes persistence for each student (persistence)?
- To what extent does teaching and learning foster key individual self-regulatory processes such as planning, monitoring, and study management for each student (planning, task management)?
- How is there individual help for each student to overcome their own anxiety, take risks and have more control over their learning (anxiety, failure avoidance, uncertain control)?
- How can there be practices that help each student manage or minimise maladaptive behavioural dimensions (self-handicapping, disengagement)?

The *MeE Framework*

This diagram is a summary of the 'M', 'e' and 'E' components of the *MeE Framework*

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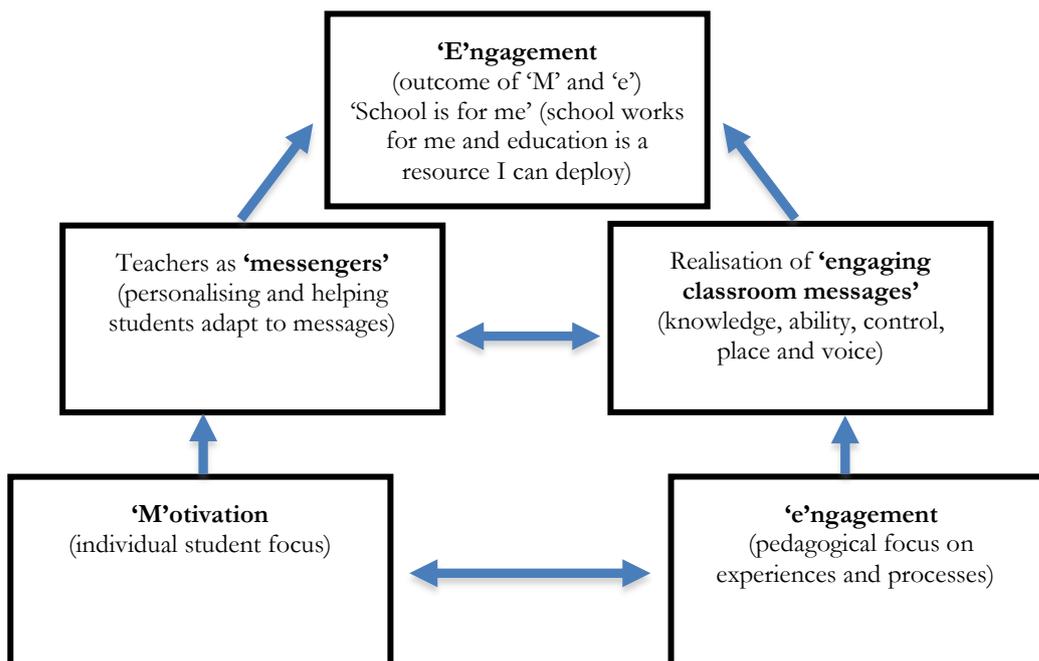
Qualitative research carried out across all aspects of the *Fair Go Program* into 'e', and quantitative analyses into 'M', both showed that 'e' (whole classroom processes) and 'M' (individual support strategies) can reliably work together to bring about a sense of - 'school is for me' – big 'E' engagement (Munns & Martin, 2013).

In the light of this continued research, the *Fair Go Program* co-researching academics and teachers use the *MeE Framework* as a critical tool as they think about what will work to encourage their students to have a stronger engagement with their classroom and school – a sense that 'school is for me'. The articles in this journal illustrate how teachers and researchers drew on different aspects of the framework as they made important changes to the work being done in schools and classrooms.

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