

# Penola Primary School Case Study

## *Background*

Penola Primary School has had a Values in Education focus for a number of years. Documenting the success of these initiatives was undertaken in the first round of the Values in Education initiative.

Primarily the school community's efforts were focussed on creating an environment in which, children could practice the values identified by the community as important. Inherent in this was the development of an intrinsic understanding that acting in a values based manner, resulted in positive benefits for the individual and the community.

Giving children the opportunity to develop and practice their values can be risky. For example, building trust means that children will need to be given responsibility and access to things that potentially can be stolen, spoilt etc. However, we have taken the approach that as with a mathematical concept or learning to kick a ball, developing a code of values requires the opportunity to practice these in a supportive environment.

For the Penola community trust and honesty are important values, best developed through practice. Therefore we do not lock classrooms during breaks, neither are the resource centre or computer suite locked. Students can have access if required. The computer suite is used with supervision three days per week. Outside of these times the children honour the expectation that you don't go in the room at breaks, unless moving through for another purpose. Equally student monitors take canteen orders into the canteen unsupervised. There is easy access to chips, freezer items etc. and yet despite this, we have found theft is not an issue. Similarly any student able to see the dials of the photocopier can use it for a legitimate purpose without direct supervision. Students are given lessons either by other children or staff so they can use the photocopier. A side bonus of this trust is the countless hours of School Service Officers time saved.

By 'giving' children a level of trust which they can live up to, we are teaching the very essence of the values desired. Conversely, we cannot expect to teach the values of trust and honesty, if we take away any opportunity that children have to learn and demonstrate these values.

In the past five years there has only been two occasions when a packet of chips has disappeared from the canteen during this unsupervised period. In both, cases the child acknowledged their mistake and continue to take their turn as monitor.

High expectations have been rewarded in the behaviour demonstrated by students. As the example above indicates students have many freedoms that are not always apparent in other settings.

Reward for 'appropriate' behaviour can be in many forms. During our fortnightly assemblies we present 'Star of the Week' awards for students demonstrating good work or behaviour. The awards are actually presented by student representatives from each class. These are complimented by special awards for achievement in academic and sporting events.

Underlying our work is an expectation that appropriate behaviour will be rewarded by normal entitlements such as: the right to learn, enjoy recess and lunchtime and have the company of friends. A few gentle reminders from staff and new students seem to be enough to highlight for our students, that there is a good deal of reward given just by attending Penola Primary in the freedom and relationships that exist. Of course the role modelling by older students is critical to our success. By their example, they demonstrate a sense of compliance with expectations that inducts younger and new students into the culture of the school.

When adults role model the values identified by the community as important, a critical component of any values based learning environment is created. 'Do as I do' is far more powerful than 'do as I say'.

An example of a conflict resolution strategy used recently involved a group of year four boys. A student appeared suddenly at the staffroom saying he was frightened because others were going to bash him. Wearing my 'principal' hat, I headed out into the yard to find the culprits. Rather than a marauding gang, I found a group of 5 sitting quietly near their classroom. I sat down between them. Commencing the investigation in a casual manner I asked what was happening. What ensued was a very confusing tale of some spying etc. that led to threats from 'someone.' I sent one of the boys to ask the victim to come for a chat. He won't come, came the message, because he's too scared. So the lads and I headed for the office, we met the victim and his mate en-route. Due to the size of the crowd, we entered a classroom where I sat down on the floor and invited the boys to join me. Further inquiries about the events resulted in more confusion about who did what. It coincided with the class returning.

We moved to my office where I had all 8/9 students sit on the floor in a close knit group. I turned to my desk and did some work, which was a signal for the boys to begin chatting. Before long everyone was in good humour. On the way out the door, I suggested the 'victim' move in a bit closer (which happened to be in the middle of the casual circle). Soon after, I returned pointing out that everyone seemed to be co-operating and enjoying each others company. I offered them a choice: put aside what happened and return to class or some time out at recess, if it continued. A simple choice!! Needless to say they returned to their classes.

I now have two friendship posters hanging on my wall. They were designed by the boys (including the victim) on their return to the classroom.

I had spoken with the victim by himself prior to his return to the class, commending him for coming to the staffroom for assistance and pointing out how his 'stocks' in the group were back to normal.

By de-escalating a problem with non threatening inquiry and a bit of time and humour we show children situations can be restored in an appropriate manner.

Children recognise any mismatch between what teachers and other school personnel preach, and what they do. Penola Primary staff are invited to reflect on their actions, to ensure a degree of consistency exists between the values identified by the community and their personal actions. One way this is done is through professional chats with line managers, when staff are invited to identify ways they contribute to the development of values education through the curriculum and their interactions with others. The reflections are collated and shared with staff to give a 'school perspective' during staff meetings. This was particularly useful when revisiting our values in 2005.

The community believe that where there is a values based environment operating, children's capacity to be resilient will be enhanced.

Our involvement in the cluster was designed to ensure congruence between our practices and stated policies and those of the Values for Australian Schools. It was also an appropriate time to reflect on and reassess the distance covered since our first values study.

## *What we have done?*

### **Reviewing and aligning our school's values to the Values for Australian Schools.**

#### **Process:**

Staff were asked to reflect on their modelling of the values identified by the community, to ensure alignment between actions and values. This was done initially through pro-chat agendas which are formal discussions held each term, which asked staff two questions:

- *How have you contributed to the ongoing success of the school's Values program?*

**Staff** described how they modelled behaviours desired, recognised student efforts and taught specific lessons introducing Program Achieve and values concepts. The interesting point here is that what appears to be a value's based behaviour by one person may be interpreted by another in another way. 'Some of our values are not evident eg lying or perhaps it's a misinterpretation/misunderstanding of what is meant'. This comment is directed towards staff and highlights some of the strategies used by some staff members to avoid taking responsibility for issues/comments that have arisen. A potential response is to suggest people challenge issues as they arise in a non-threatening manner. Obviously this becomes easier when feedback is received in an accommodating manner. Students are very quick to pick up this sort of tension amongst staff. So as adults demonstrating respect is a responsibility we have and can share with others.

- *How do you see us improving our work in values?*

**Staff** were quite critical in this area saying either they or colleagues could do even more to model the values identified. Explicit teaching of dispositions associated with particular values was also important. A number commended the students on their efforts in demonstrating values based actions.

Following the professional chats, the principal collated the information and shared staff opinions and perceptions at a staff meeting. Staff were invited to reflect on the issues raised. Some staff received additional feedback in response to the information gathered. This can be challenging for both participants in the discussion because what is perceived as an issue by one person can be interpreted another way by someone else. Any discussion will necessarily be personally and emotionally challenging, because of the role our values have underpinning our actions and identity.

To ensure consistency in our values, the next step in the process involved discussions around the Values for Australian Schools and those previously identified by the Penola Community. Through a process of discussions and matching the two sets of values, staff were able to identify linkages for the majority of the values. Integrity

was one quality that staff believed was gained through values based actions. It was felt that integrity was a behavioural characteristic generally assigned to someone by others.

A focus for our conversations also revolved around ‘what qualities would you like our Year 7s to exhibit when they leave Penola Primary School? The focus question also formed the basis for discussion with and between parents and students. The point at issue, was if students were to exhibit the qualities desired, they would need to act in a values orientated way. The logical consequence of these discussions was an ongoing review of policies and practices that support the development of the desired outcomes.

For example a review of our Behaviour Code was designed to foster student values of Respect and Responsibilities. (Appendix 1) Equally important is the role of community in maintaining positive attitudes to the school as an educational institution and the curriculum ethos that it espouses. Unity of purpose and expectations are powerful determinants of success. Therefore a close relationship between staff and parents is required. This is developed by social interaction, invitations for parental involvement in activities such as: camps, committees, class support, etc and regular communication through newsletters, local media etc.

**Students** through the Student Representative Council and the Drug Strategy Team worked through a similar process to that used by staff. Teacher co-ordinator Ms. Alison Whibley engaged students through a range of activities (*Refer Appendix 1*) so that they identified values they considered important including:

<b>Emotional resilience</b>	Patience	Controlling your temper
Always happy	<b>Persistence</b>	Fairness
<b>Respect</b>	Stop, think, do	Equity
Communication skills	Successful	Integrity
Positive actions	Trying	Achievement
Setting and completing goals	Creative minds	Taking Risks
Sharing ideas	Resilient to people’s actions	Speaking up
<b>Honesty</b>	<b>Listening to others</b>	Organization
<b>Getting along</b>	Keeping friends	Bouncing back
Looking on the bright side of things	<b>Trust</b>	Truth
Co-operation	Security	<b>Caring</b>
Safety	Social Skills	Getting out into the community
Participating in sports	Making friends	
Behaviour	Share	
Management	Not talking back	

*Qualities in bold were mentioned multiple times.*

Safety was a value that children saw as important. For them it was about feeling safe at school. It translated into respecting others and for others to respect them --- no teasing, fighting or putdowns.

The children also gave a clear message that the school's values had to be easily recognised and understood, like *Program Achieve* with its five keys for success. Elements of *Program Achieve* came through as the children discussed values and what they meant to them. Displaying value prompts, is important. James Year 4 said, "I look up there on the wall and it tells me all about it," when referring to the *Program Achieve* symbols.

**Parent** opinions regarding values were sought through the newsletter, from Governing Council, Parent Club and through the Values Forum.

The Values Forum was a collaborative effort between the Student Drug Strategy Team, Ms Whibley and the principal. The students worked with parents around drug related issues that naturally led to responses about values. The parents then had the opportunity to match and discuss in small groups, the existing values and the Values for Australian Schools. Interestingly a trend emerged that reflected much of the Modbury Primary School model of core values and supporting values. Like the other groups in the school community, parents were keen for the set of values to be adopted by the school to be meaningful for students. (Appendix 3).

## *Outcomes*

1. A strong sense of congruence developed in the community that there were two core values RESPECT and RESPONSIBILITY. Using the Modbury Primary Framework as a guide, a similar model was developed to capture the essence of the Penola Primary vision. This Framework clearly has the two core values being supported by other subsidiary values.

Respect and Responsibility are the two key values that are discussed with students enrolling at the school. Conversations go something like this: if you respect yourself, you will accept responsibility for completing your work and behaviour, interact appropriately with others and try your best. By doing these things, you will be successful in your learning, enjoy the company of friends at recess and lunchtimes and feel good about yourself. An indicator of our success is the development of significantly improved behaviour patterns by children who came to the school with a 'history' of problems.

2. Celebration and recognition of what we are doing well. Our celebrations are based on evidence such as the retention of staff, academic achievement of students, client survey responses and the reflective notes of a permanent relieving teacher who worked in the school for seven weeks over two time periods.
3. An improved understanding by members of the community of how our school community's values are reflected in the Values for Australian schools. The forum processes involved matching and discussing how Penola Primary School's values were complimentary with those of the Values for Australian Schools. From this there was agreement that reducing the number and complexity of values was important for student identification. They also thought that while important some values were subsidiary to others, hence the development of core values.
4. It has helped us understand the value our work in this area to date. A strategy we have found useful to check our values in practice is to interview students new to the school. ( less than 12 months) Students can give some insightful assessments of a school. Prof. Colin MacMullin spoke with students across a range of year levels. Their comments included:
  - o Students and staff are friendlier
  - o We work harder and have more time to do stuff
  - o 'You are trusted' .... 'We can use the photocopier'' Year 3
5. The process for developing a succinct school motto is currently in place. Each sector of the community is contributing options for consideration. Classes, Parent Club, Governing Council and staff brainstormed possible options most of which revolved around Respect and Responsibility. The same groups then voted to form a short list. This list will be circulated through the newsletter

seeking input from all parents. The final choice will then be used around the school etc as a prompt for action.

6. Realignment of the school's Behaviour Code is underway to ensure all elements are compatible with the Values Framework. This involved reassessing the previous Code. This was done by a small committee. Their task was to ensure the values identified by the community and recorded on the framework were evident throughout the language, practices and strategies identified. The draft is currently being presented to key school groups for further input and agreement. *(Refer Appendix 1)*

## Appendix 1

### Students Process

Refer to the staff review to outline the process. This was altered only in the length of time that was given for each activity and that we had to spend a 15-20 min period discussing what a value was and what the values that the school had originally chosen meant. There was some confusion about their understanding of the terms and this led to the comment by a student, 'If we don't understand it, how can it be a school value?'

The students are always enthusiastic about sharing their ideas and opinions in any way. By looking at our values, this encouraged the students to discuss other areas of the school that they thought worked well, or that they thought could be improved on. Increased student voice and involvement was a common theme in these discussions as well as students wanting to be listened to and have their opinions valued rather than ignored. This was obvious by the type of student involved in the discussion and the amount and level of enthusiasm this topic raised.

The students were also the presenters at the parent forum, taking their involvement to the next step. One of the key ways to learn is to teach. They initially found it difficult to articulate what they needed to say, but by working as a group and individually with the teacher, they were able to present concise and relevant information to the parents, and get them involved in an activity, which they also ran. A dry run though with some other adults would have benefited them, to 'iron out any creases', which is something to remember for next time.

## Appendix 2

### Staff T& D Day Review

- All staff from the school attended the morning session on values education, including the canteen and SSO staff.
- We started the day using the Salisbury PowerPoint presentation, which helped to show staff what the project meant and future directions. This was also useful in relating other programs that we are currently involved in to the values project and vice versa, to help show staff that this is not a one off egg. Drug Strategy, Program Achieve.
- We showed and discussed with them the Modbury framework, highlighting where we were up to in terms of our planning and involvement of others e.g. Colin's time, parental involvement etc.
- Staff then brainstormed the qualities that they would like to see students have when they left PPS. This elicited a lot of discussion around 'What is a value and what is a quality?'
- Some of the common qualities/ values were: caring, tolerance, respect, resilience, self-esteem, organization, and security.
- Some staff members asked about the 'Choice Theory' and are keen to hear what I report back after our meeting.
- Staff then moved onto matching the National values with our school values. There were some very clear gaps in areas that our school values did not cover (Responsibility, Freedom & Understanding, Tolerance & Inclusion) and areas where we had a lot of overlap (Doing Your Best). Staff then matched the qualities that they had brainstormed with the values. Staff quickly discovered that many of the qualities fit into values as outcomes of that value. They also considered that many of the values and qualities could fit under two main values – Respect & Responsibility.
- Some groups maintained that after that was another set of values that needed to be explicit, and we developed our idea of core values and what that would look like.
- The discussion evolved to what we do as a staff, and there was some in depth reflection about our personal views and beliefs and how we 'inflict' them on others or how we can be inconsiderate of these. There was a basic understanding developed that if the staff didn't uphold the idea and example of 'values' towards each other, let alone towards the students, there was some consistency lacking and how could we address these issues.

## Appendix 3

### Parent Forum Review

- We had 14 attendees – 5 of whom had attended a previous session.
- This group focused more on the 'self' of the child rather than the holistic/ community side.
- We followed the same format that we used for the staff T&D day.
- It was relatively easy to attach the school values to the National values. Parents were asked to brainstorm and then match qualities that they wanted their child to have before they left primary school. There were some difficulties matching the qualities as some were abstract (quality of money) and some were skills or understandings that came about because of the values a child have (body of knowledge).
- Some of the qualities/ values that parents identified as being the most important were: tolerance, caring/ compassionate, self esteem, confidence, seek knowledge, organized, study skills, honesty, good judgment, persistence.
- Parents were directed to identify key of core values that the others may fit under. Respect was used as a suggestion and parents followed suit. Motivation was another that was suggested.
- Parents seemed 'keen' to embrace the idea of core values (Respect) from which the others flowed.