

# **Modbury School, South Australia – incorporating values into teaching programmes across key learning areas: a principal’s perspective**

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## **Background**

Modbury School is a small school of approximately 164 students. It was once a large school but over the years enrolments have fallen, due partly to demography and partly to the school losing a sense of identity and clarity of purpose.

As Principal I declared my commitment to Values Education when applying for the position. It was made quite clear that I would concentrate on the re-culturing of the school based on a values framework.

The first part of the journey was to implement a process to develop a set of values to guide the vision and identity of the school. The bigger picture was to redevelop the site into a community school in which the services of the wider community were based on the school site. We now have on our site the University of the Third Age, a toy library and a professional art group. The valuing of life-long learning and the availability of these services to our students have been of great benefit for all concerned.

The community school concept highlights the need for a clear connection between learning and the wider community, emphasising the need for a holistic view of education and the changing concept and purpose of education and schools. The Modbury School community is committed to achieving a values-based curriculum framework which will drive long-term sustainable change and ultimately influence our world view about teaching and learning. Parents have stated that ‘Values are the glue that will hold the school together, giving it an identity and soul’. The staff are highly supportive of this vision and are keen to work through the process of introducing values-based education to the school.

## **Definitions and assumptions**

Values Education at Modbury has been introduced in a holistic way, encompassing the importance of and focus on values within this learning

community. To be effective within the school's context, values education needs to examine the following:

- Personal values and belief systems operating within the school's staff and the community
- Clarifying values that the school and community identify with in order to focus energy on a preferred vision for the school
- Teaching explicitly the importance of values across the curriculum using a valuing process
- Skilling students to be optimistic, resilient and empowered individuals who have a strong identity, who can articulate their values and who continually aspire and strive to live by such core and priority values
- Modelling that congruence between values and practice in our daily interactions speaks louder than words
- Aligning policies within the school with our values, beginning with our Behaviour Management Policy – emphasising the importance of relationships and relational learning principles
- Developing a learning community through a strong partnership with the parents, empowering them to participate simultaneously in learning opportunities being offered to staff and students.

We have also learnt that values education is complex and different people have different views about how we obtain our values, that is, if our values are influenced by our culture or experiences and if, indeed, our values can be shifted. Values are developmental, moving from our 'foundation' values to our 'focus' values and, finally, to our 'aspirational' values. This realisation posits an interesting view of values and how we develop pathways to reach our aspirational values.

## **Program objectives**

From my previous leadership experience in values education, I realised that this work was going to be demanding as it requires everyone to examine their own beliefs about who they are, their roles as educators and, indeed, their own world view and habits of mind. We have acknowledged that the school's project could be viewed as very ambitious. However, in my experience, it does provide a clear window through which you can observe a complex, interconnected and systems view of change using a values framework.

The program identified the following interconnected elements.

1. **Developing values as a whole school community:** The work on values had to first focus on clarifying values with the staff and obtaining feedback from the community about what they valued for their children's education. A questionnaire was sent home to all parents requesting their feedback about the school and what they valued in education. Their responses would form the backbone of the final values selection and statements to guide the school.

The staff, governing council and students participated in a process using the work of Dr Scott Bristol – based on the work on values by Dr Brian Hall and Benjamin Tonna – to measure people's values and choices from a comprehensive set of 130 values. This process was to identify the commonality and disparity of values held across the community and identify values which the whole community shares.

2. **Social skills programs:** Developing a whole school approach to resilience and self-esteem for all students by teaching them skills of how to be successful learners through the introduction of Program Achieve with underpinning foundation values of persistence, getting along, confidence and organisation.
3. **Developing a mentoring program** for 10 students from R-7 who were identified by the staff and their parents as needing special support in developing self-esteem and strategies to play safe, negotiate with others in a respectful manner and work towards eliminating harassing and bullying other students.
4. **Behaviour management shift:** Beginning the thinking around reviewing the Behaviour Management Policy, to create a shift from a behaviourist approach to a values approach by focusing on restorative relationships and supporting students to learn with a mind-set that supports positive behaviour and positive outcomes in relationships.
5. **Curriculum:** Using the SACSA framework all teachers used the Essential Learnings of Identity and Interdependence to develop their overview this term. The development of a supportive and safe learning environment centred on some teachers reframing old-style classroom rules into a significant values approach.
6. **Professional development of staff:** Professional development has focused on using Program Achieve, dealing with challenging behaviours using this program and emphasising working with children using the Habits of the Mind program to encourage children

to take control and to make appropriate choices, therefore improving outcomes connected with self-esteem, learning and relationships.

7. **Learning programs for the community:** Working with the Education sub-Committee of the governing council to organise a range of learning opportunities for parents on values and Program Achieve.

All these elements have clearly begun to shift the direction of the school to incorporating the values agenda. We expected that this would take at least three years to achieve, allowing sufficient time for reflection, cultural shifts, differences in people's world views and time to understand the change. Nevertheless, as Principal, I am well aware of the need for the balance between challenge and support, creating the tension for disequilibrium in order to create new pathways to achieve the outcomes needed for improving teaching and learning.

## **Evaluation**

### **Consultation process with the wider community**

In the process for clarifying values for Modbury School, the first phase of the consultation process was the **questionnaire to parents**.

We asked five open-ended questions, hoping to elicit which values were behind the statements made. The Marketing committee and the Education sub-committee of the governing council organised and managed this process to obtain a clearer picture of what parents wanted for their children at Modbury. This was the response:

Parents agree they want a primary school to provide a complete education for their children, encompassing an excellent level of academic achievement, life skills, social skills and self-worth within a safe, secure, happy and enjoyable environment. We need to create this image of our school in terms of our visions/ directions/values/practices etc and promote it to both the school and local community. Parents need to know our school will provide a learning environment that will give their children all the skills and knowledge necessary to take them to their next level of learning and indeed foster a life-long love of learning for their journey through life. The whole school needs to do the utmost to ensure our school is considered an 'ideal' place of learning in the community and the image/perception of our school truly reflects the school's practices and visions.

It was encouraging to see feedback from the parents, reaffirming to the newly established Values Reference Group that we were indeed on the right track with our values focus. However, we continued our learning around values clarification and wanted in fact to involve the parents of the governing council in some deeper learning. To that end we worked with a consultant who took us through the Values Inventory process designed by Scott Bristol of LJMap. This engaged the parents further in exploring their values in relation to what they wanted Modbury School to provide for their children. Both the parents and staff learnt more about the complexity of values and how they operate in organisations. The 130 values identified by Scott Bristol are further classified into three developmental cycles:

**Cycle 1 – Journey of self-worth** Values of comfort; safety; self-control; wonder; hope; being law abiding; membership; praise; reciprocating; respect; achieving; communicating; being confident, dependable and supporting.

**Cycle 2 – Journey of self-expression** Values of being considerate; diligence; independence; joy; quality; responsibility; adaptation; appreciation; choice; empathy; humour; initiating; open-mindedness; altruism; creativity; envisioning; forgiveness; teamwork; timeliness.

**Cycle 3 – Journey of selfless expression** Values of balance; compassion; democracy; being holistic; inspiration; conservation; inspiration; humanitarianism; pluralism; transformation; knowledge ; vitality.

Through this process we were able to assess where the school's values fitted into the model. Part of the model assisted us in seeing how we maintain a sense of our own identity through three specific ways of learning:

1. **Physical (Acting):** Learning through doing and being active.
2. **Feeling (Connecting):** Learning through all the senses, needing to communicate with others and using the emotions in learning.
3. **Thinking (Observing):** Learning through observation and thinking; learning using logic and visual connections.

We understand, of course, that all learners use these different ways of thinking in interacting with the world around them. However, there is often a preference.

### **Working with the staff**

Staff were involved in a similar values clarification task using the Scott Bristol process but, instead, did this online. This process took each staff member 2– 2½

hours to complete. Their responses were analysed and a further process was used to incorporate the values chosen for the school. The values that scored the highest included respect, safety, teamwork, humour, honesty, democracy, communication, friendliness, being holistic and being inquiring.

This process is also used to further clarify where individuals are within the three development cycles which identify where they are in their journey of self-discovery and learning. As the Principal, it provides me with further understanding about where individuals are at, and also to see where my values sit in relation to the team's and the community's so that I can be more fully aware of others' world views in relation to mine. As a leader, this assists me in working with the community to achieve a sense of cohesion and vision which will provide quality education for our students.

### **Working with the students**

We worked with both Year 6 and Year 7 classes in a leadership day and during that time all the students had a say in the type of school they wanted at Modbury. We then selected a small sample of students from the two classes to participate in the same process that the teachers and parents in the governing council used with the 130 values.

We found an amazing correlation between the values that were chosen by staff, parents on the governing council and the responses we collated from the questionnaire from the wider community. It was very reassuring to see the same type of values recurring and highlighted as important for the Modbury community.

### **Putting the values feedback together**

To ensure that we considered all the information obtained we placed all the values from the three groups in a Venn diagram. This provided a clear picture of the values chosen by the separate groups and the common values. We also worked on value statements that supported the values that we had identified.

## **Modbury School's values**

### **Our foundation**

- As members of this community we all take responsibility to ensure we have a safe and secure environment (Values – Safety, Self-control, Responsibility, Membership).
- We value each other and treat each other in an honest and caring way (Values – Respect, Honesty, Consideration).
- We create an environment that stimulates wonder and enhances learning for all (Values – Inquiry, Achievement, Wonder, Creativity).

### **Our focus**

- With our foundation in place, we are building a school that encourages inquiry and autonomous learning. We do this through creativity, teamwork and communication (Values – inquiry, initiative, creativity, independence, teamwork, communication).
- In all this we encourage a sense of fun and play (Values – support, play).

### **Our aspirations**

- Ultimately, we believe in being humanitarian as we strive together to develop knowledge and wisdom in a democratic and holistic way (Values – humanitarianism, knowing, knowledge, democracy, being holistic, teamwork)

Again we sent out this work to the wider community for further consultation and feedback.

## **Response**

Some parents, although very supportive of the statements and their underpinning values, wondered if there were too many values for people to focus on. They also mentioned the need to monitor the success of the values within the school. Some other comments related to the actual words used to express the values and support the statements.

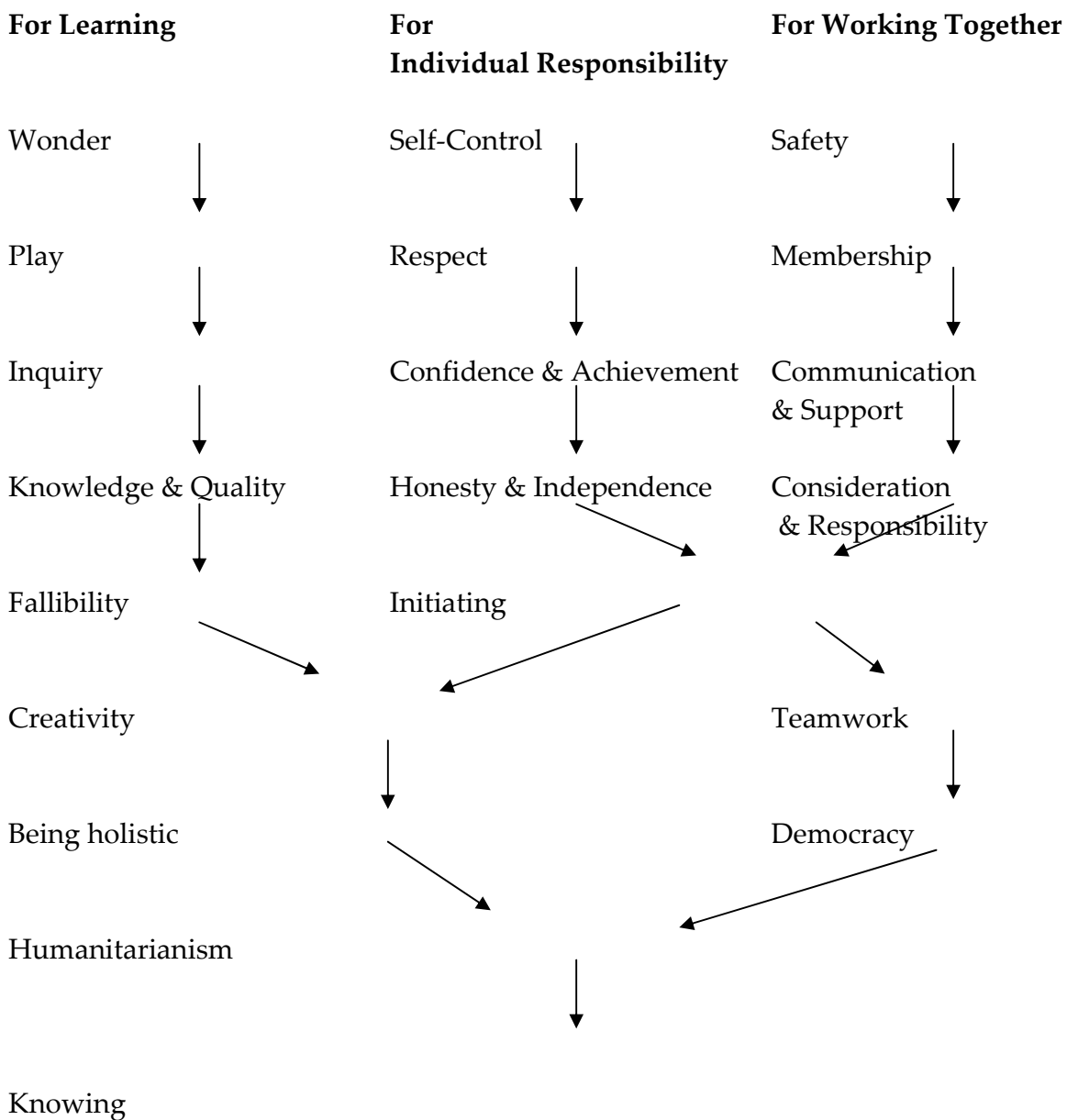
In order to achieve and work with these values it became clear that for our school and parents there were three clear pathways that needed to be addressed simultaneously in order to achieve a cohesive team and work through priorities that will imbed values as part of our culture. There was great congruence

between staff, parents and students in articulating the values that were important for the school. The pathways are:

1. The **Learning Pathway**, which was echoed strongly by parents. For example, parents articulated the need to ensure that practices, policies and the curriculum supported this pathway. Methodologies need to match this values approach to learning, self-discovery and active citizenship to preserve our environment and to learn from our mistakes.
2. The **Individual Responsibility Pathway** is about teaching students and adults to be responsible citizens who develop self-control, are respectful, can initiate, create and ultimately work successfully with others, care deeply about our world and gain great insights, deep knowledge and, ultimately, wisdom.
3. The **Working Together Pathway** emphasises the need to operate within a safe and respectful environment, working together to achieve the school's vision, which leads to desired knowledge and understanding.

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## Primary Value Pathways



- These pathways are part of the school's whole approach and cannot be taken in isolation from each other.
- They form the rich fabric of our school with many of the dilemmas and contradictions to be resolved in the ongoing learning experience.

In understanding the complexity of values we have realised throughout this process that all values are not equal, so we ask our community to:

- Judge us on those foundation values that we must all live out together to ensure we are a safe and viable school
- Understand that we are on a journey of self-expression together in which we practise our day-to-day priority values to make us responsible citizens
- Support the school in aspiring to new and challenging values that open the way to our future
- Join us as we explore and learn to embrace the paradox of competing values.

## **Social Skills Program**

### **Preschool–Year 7**

We have introduced a social skills program that focuses on developing resilience and optimism in our children. The foundation values of this program include getting along, developing confidence, learning persistence and being organised. Teachers are focused in supporting and skilling students to be successful learners.

### **Social skills program – Students at risk**

The social skills program was organised for 10 students across the school – one group of junior primary boys in Year 2, the other a mix of Year 6 and Year 7 students.

The aim of this program focused on the following lessons held three times a week for seven weeks:

- Agreeing on the importance of clarifying group values
- Work on understanding roles and responsibilities
- Building confidence and positive self talk
- Exploring caring talk
- Building confidence and positive talk to others
- Expressing feelings
- Expressing feelings safely
- Learning the STOP, THINK, DO response for challenging situations.-
- Exploring what a friend is
- Exploring trust in friendship
- Exploring friendly advice for challenging situations
- Exploring valuing in students' lives
- Exploring what is a caring school.

### **Leadership training**

Another area we have targeted is working with all Year 6 and Year 7 students to develop leadership skills and to increase their level of commitment and responsibility as senior students. Ten students participated in the National Young Leaders Day. Students have enjoyed having greater responsibility throughout the school. Extending leadership across the school aims to provide more opportunity for student voices. The SRC is important and effective only if it is taken seriously and students feel that their ideas are really listened to.

## **Strategies used within the class to support the values**

### **Group work**

Students took a while to accept this different way of doing things even though this was discussed prior to commencing this new process. Students became more aware that in working with a wide range of students they were able to see their different strengths. They began to appreciate their differences but at the same time draw on the skills and understanding they brought to the team. As students worked in rotating teams they began to discover for themselves that all students had areas of strengths and areas they needed to improve on.

### **Discussions**

Teachers facilitate discussions to include students who avoid expressing thoughts and ideas in front of others, making sure that students who are not readily accepted by the whole group are involved and are valued as class members by all.

### **Ongoing positive feedback**

Students and staff are consciously aware of providing ongoing positive feedback throughout the day and in different situations using the language of values and strengthening relationships.

### **Independence and responsibility**

Students are given more opportunities to make their own decisions about their learning, and encouraged to use their initiative without seeking constant approval or permission from the teacher.

### **Respect and tolerance**

Through discussions, role-play and reflection on general day-to-day interactions, students are learning that respect and tolerance are desirable values. Students

have learnt to differentiate between unacceptable behaviour and their feelings about the person involved.

### **Organisation/Planning**

These are ongoing issues that are dealt with on a daily basis because each student is at a different stage of taking responsibility. The aim is to support students to be well organised so that they will experience success as part of their learning.

### **Professional development of staff**

The single most influential factor in introducing values across the whole school is the professional development of staff. Understanding values is not easy and it requires working with educators or consultants who are able to assist staff to understand their own values and world views in order to focus on their behaviours and the affects of their behaviours on others. At Modbury we have started that journey. Staff use language that reflects our understanding about values in order to move forward and support this approach to the improvement and re-culturing of the school. If staff are not supportive of this, or are unwilling to apply their knowledge or understanding to improving their practices and their relationship with students, staff and parents, then not much changes and there will be no direct benefit to the students.

### **Communication with staff on values**

#### **Curriculum**

- Tying specifically the outcomes from SACSA in Society and Environment and Health and PE to developing a supportive learning environment within each classroom. (In an integrated approach we would look at ways in which this ties in with other curriculum areas, eg Art, Music and English.)
- In particular, highlighting identity and interdependence from the Essential Learnings to express the values across curriculum areas.
- Two workshops with whole staff to assist them in incorporating values across the curriculum.

#### **Positive self-esteem**

- The introduction of Program Achieve across the school, Preschool to Year 7, to scaffold students to be successful learners. This program compliments the values education approach to learning and student wellbeing.
- Working with students who have been identified as needing support in developing self-esteem so that they can form more effective relationships with other students either in the class or in the schoolyard.

- Groups of children working with staff, focusing on developing positive wellbeing (12 students) in Middle to Upper Primary.
- Leadership day/s planned with the Year 6 and Year 7 students.

### **Developing values as a whole school community**

- Working with the Reference Group, which included convenors from the major governing council sub-committees and staff representatives to monitor the progress of the values project.
- Working with a consultant to obtain congruence between our values, including those of staff, parents and students, using the Values Inventory.
- Initiating a Learning Program for parents to strengthen partnerships and share the learning that staff and students were involved in. In particular, learning about Program Achieve, managing anger, and the importance of values in the curriculum.

### **Release time for staff**

- Meeting with a consultant to further clarify personal values and relate them to the school's vision for improvement.
- Working with their learning team to share practice and learn from one another.
- Meeting with me for regular professional discussions. Focuses of discussion included: how to develop a supportive learning environment that reflected the values; how values are integrated with the curriculum; sharing how values support and strengthen relationships.

### **Reflections**

The issue of *whose* values always arises and inevitably the questions arise about imposing values or discussing if values are taught or caught! We discussed the differences or similarities between values at school and values at home and what we should do if they are different. However, I believe there is consensus about universal values and that we can build on these values for our schools.

The school has made enormous progress in all aspects of the interrelated projects which have been introduced across the school. What is very clear is that the values agenda is here to stay and everyone is aware that everyone has taken it seriously. The community is expecting the school to follow through on this project for the next two years to ensure that the school develops a culture that is congruent with our values.

## **Future directions in values education**

- Continue our work on our values, unpacking the values and using a process to determine the principles and practices encompassing our foundation, focus and aspirational values.
- Continue research for class teachers who have agreed to plan techniques for gathering some baseline data. Staff have been introduced to the teaching and learning valuing cycle from the Asia-Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education (APNIEVE) and we are constantly in the process of discussing strategies for helping children to develop knowledge and conceptual understanding about values.
- Behaviour Management Policy – incorporate values and the notion of restorative justice in guiding our principles about behaviour management and student wellbeing. We would like to explore further the effect our thinking and emotions have on our behaviour and ultimately our relationships and effective learning.
- Professional development of staff – using APNIEVE’s valuing process; continue work with Program Achieve.
- Continue the Community Learning Program for parents.

I am encouraged by the continual support and commitment I have found from parents, students and staff in using the values framework for change. Recently, the school has gone through a comprehensive review of our priorities in preparation for the next five years. Our strategic directions continue to emphasise the importance of values which will permeate the way we think about teaching and learning in this school. We know that this need energy and commitment to make a difference in the long term. We are prepared at Modbury School to take on the challenge.