

What is the good of public schooling? “Living the values” at Southvale Primary School

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Debates about the purpose of schooling date back to Ancient Greece and Plato’s Republic, and can be tracked through to Dewey’s Democracy and Education, and to current debates in Australia about the goals of schooling, who decides, and who pays. The purpose of public education continues to be constructed, contested and reconstructed in policy, in the media, and through practices in school communities. Most commentators stress the importance of striking a balance between extrinsic and intrinsic values of schooling and between individual (private) and societal (public) gains. In Australia in 2004, one prominent area of debate has been the place of values education in our public schools.

This paper tells the story of one school community’s struggle to find its purpose and to implement school-wide changes in line with five values: Honesty, Caring, Respect, Self-responsibility and Tolerance. We describe how the values at Southvale Primary School were derived, how they now inform communication and relationships at the school, and how these values are beginning to inform pedagogy and curriculum. We raise important questions about the purpose of schooling, the role of values education, and about who has a legitimate voice in these debates.

Introduction

Research context

This paper draws on research that was conducted as part of the Victorian Schools Innovation Commission’s *Beyond the Pilot* project (VSIC, 2004). Southvale Primary School is one of nine innovative sites that were selected for participation in the research phase of *Beyond the Pilot*. Using a research design informed by actor-network theory (Callon 1986), this research followed trails of interviews, observations and artefacts to document the innovation at each site, focusing on how the innovation evolved and how it is sustained over time. Southvale’s innovation is its sustained and integrated approach to values education.

Southvale Primary School is located on the border of Noble Park and Springvale South. The school has 11 grades. Children come from 32 different ethnic backgrounds, with 88% of students speaking a language other than English at home. The major ethnic groups are Vietnamese, Chinese and Khmer. Over 50% of students at the school are in receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowance. The school has a significantly high SLN index – 1.492, which puts it in Group 9 of the “like” school classification, representing only 10% of schools in the state. In May 2004, the school had seventeen children on Disabilities and Impairments Funding. The School has a high level of mobility in the student population. Between the beginning of Term 1 and May 2004, approximately 40 new students had enrolled at the School, with some students enrolling for only small amounts of time before moving out of the School. In May 2004, 255 students were enrolled at the School. In September 2004, 216 students were enrolled at the School.

The authors have all been involved in the research process. Sue Barford is Principal at the school and a participant in the study. Andrea Kohne is a teacher at the school, who undertook the bulk of the data collection, including staff, student and parent interviews and the collection of artefacts, as well as being interviewed herself. Julianne Lynch is a lecture at Deakin University who was commissioned by VSIC to collate and analyse the data and to write the case report that will be published by VSIC in 2005.

Broad context of values education

We believe that public schools can be places where all children acquire the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to lead happy, productive lives and be contributing citizens in our democracy. This vision includes children and youth learning the knowledge and skills necessary to obtain employment and maintain a strong and vibrant global economy. This is not sufficient to ensure a happy and fulfilling life, however. Students must also learn the knowledge and skills necessary to get along with each other; to address conflicting but legitimate claims; to live with others from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; and to reconstruct our society to better approximate [democratic ideals]. (Edgar et al., 2002, p.232)

The purpose of public education is generally understood to be multiple. Schooling ought to serve a democracy by producing citizens who are both motivated towards, and capable of participating in, political life. Schooling ought to serve an economy by producing a skilled, entrepreneurial workforce. Schooling ought to serve a community by reducing prejudice and promoting social cohesion among diverse groups. Schooling ought to serve a culture by inducting members into ways of behaving and seeing the world, and by stimulating critical understandings and creative energies. These are some of the societal purposes that schooling is expected to serve. Increasingly, schooling is also understood to result in private gains. Each of the outcomes listed above has its individual equivalent, such as, the production of skills in an individual that might lead to individual economic gains. The balance of these gains has been long contested, particularly the relative emphasis that ought to be given to individual gains and more instrumental public gains (Groundwater-Smith, et al., 2001; Kemmis, Cole & Suggett, 1983). Big names in this field (eg. Dewey, 1916/1966; Fullan, 1999) argue that both the individual and societal gains of education are critical in a democratic society.

This paper focuses on one aspect of the purpose of schooling: values education. Values education can be seen as serving both individual and societal needs. Values education first emerged as an explicit part of Australian State curriculum documents in the late 19th Century (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), 2003). Despite this, until recently, there has been much less explicit focus on values education in formal government documents (Ling et al, 1998). However, in the past decade, values education has attracted increasingly explicit attention by governments and schools in Australia, paralleling similar trends in the UK and the USA (DEST, 2003). Governments are increasingly emphasising the social and ethical outcomes of schooling (DEST, 2003). This can be seen in *The National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 1999), which makes repeated and explicit reference to the role of schooling in producing particular attitudes,

dispositions and personal skills in students. And public debates around the issue of values education came to a head this year when Prime Minister John Howard made inflammatory comments to the media, claiming that Australia's public schools were "too politically correct and too values-neutral" (The Age, January 20, 2004).

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) recognises that existing curriculum documents provide little guidance on values education. Their *Guide to Proposed Reform of Victorian Curriculum* (VCAA, 2004) identifies ten values that will form the basis of the new curriculum framework, as well as personal attributes and social skills. These moves respond to criticisms of earlier frameworks and reflect a new wave of attention that is being given to values education in schools.

Despite increased attention and a number of reviews, values education remains a contested domain, where there is very little known about the outcome of values education in schools or how values education might be effectively implemented.

This paper provides an account of 'the Values'¹ innovation at Southvale, how it emerged over the period from 2001 to 2004, the challenges it faces, and the factors involved in its success. We also explore the wider implications that can be taken from the case study, in terms of school-based values education and in terms of innovation and change in schools. A more extensive report of the data collection methods and findings of this study will appear in 2005.

What do 'the Values' look like at Southvale?

Values education at Southvale Primary School incorporates curriculum, pedagogical, behavioural, policy and organisational aspects. The core values that have been adopted by the School are part of the formal curriculum, but they are also applied to student behaviour, to staff behaviour, to interactions with the broader community, and increasingly, to approaches to teaching and learning. The School's leadership team argues that 'the Values' is not a program; it is a way of being and an approach to schooling. A review of interview transcripts and other artefacts, collected as part of the *Beyond the Pilot* project, reveals that each of the following are seen by members of the school as being part of 'the Values' at Southvale:

- Formal decision-making processes, including a "flat management" system, consultation with students and parents, and "an atmosphere of asking 'why?'";
- Formal and informal interactions between staff that are based on the core Values, and professional development sessions designed to support staff in understanding and implementing appropriate forms of communication;
- Formal and informal interactions between staff and students that are based on the core Values, and a Code of Conduct that promotes the Values and student self-responsibility;

¹ This term is used by teachers, students and parent at Southvale Primary School to refer to a set of five philosophical ideals that have been adopted as the core values of the school: caring, honesty, respect, self-responsibility, and tolerance. These values have been used as the rationale of a range of changes in the school. The teachers, the researchers and members of VSIC, also use the term *the Values* to refer to *the innovation as a whole*, that is, the various activities that are counted-in as manifestations of, or mechanisms that promote the use of, the School's values.

- Communication between students that is based on the core values, and the increasing use of restorative justice processes to resolve student disputes;
- Improved interactions and relationships with parents and the wider community, including those supported by the employment of a community liaison officer, the translation of notices into community languages, the involvement of parents in the work of the school, and the running of parent groups for learning English, computers skills, floral arrangements, etc;
- Formal processes of induction to the School, such as a staff shadowing and mentoring program and an induction process for new staff, student teachers and new students;
- Aspects of the physical environment, including the appearance and arrangement of classrooms, displays focusing on the Values, the school dog, and complementary programs such as the Breakfast Club and the Walking School Bus;
- Aspects of the policy environment, including class time dedicated to discussion of the Values, and reference to the Values in school policies (eg. the ISDES policy, the School Charter, and the Code of Conduct);
- Pedagogical initiatives, such as the use of student self-assessment, student digital portfolios, and student-negotiated programs, with an emphasis on student leadership and the role of self-responsibility in learning; and,
- Curriculum initiatives, such as units of work drawing on student work in the school garden.

Visitors to the school also comment on a tangible school ethos that is welcoming, caring and democratic.

How did ‘the Values’ emerge?

Time for change

Reflecting on the implementation of ‘the Values’, the School leadership team believe that, with the appointment of a new Principal in July 2000, the School was “ready for change”. Building on activities already underway in the school, in consultation with the leadership team and the wider school community, the Principal initiated the implementation of the school Values. This initiative was in response to what the leadership team perceived as multi-faceted problems arising from cultural intolerance and low community expectations for success, with many students having an expectation of future failure as adults due to language, cultural and economic barriers. This was seen to manifest in high levels of student bullying and violence, a perceived lack of social cohesion in the school and wider community, intolerance among students, and a disjointed community, where many parents appeared to be disenfranchised and disconnected from the School community and the schooling of their children, with no real opportunity to learn English and establish a voice in the school. These trends have been interpreted by the Principal and leadership team as symptoms of broad disconnection and disenfranchisement in a community where many families have fled their countries of origin to escape war, persecution and poverty.

The changes implemented at Southvale that constitute their 'Values' innovation were prompted by a general staff dissatisfaction with the existing Assertive Discipline model of behaviour management (Canter & Canter, 1976), and a series of distressing incidents involving students of the school: The most tragic being the death of a former pupil of the School, the youngest ever heroin overdose person in Victoria. The Principal initiated a process for teachers to explore their "moral purpose", from both individual and school points of view. Then the School undertook consultation with the community to determine the School's values. This process was largely driven by parent, teacher and student surveys. As a result, Southvale Primary School has adopted five philosophical ideals as the core values of the school: caring, honesty, respect, self-responsibility, and tolerance. These values have been used as the rationale of a range of changes in the School that respond to a range of perceived problems. It is the intention of the Principal and the leadership team that these values inform, and serve as a measure of, all interactions in the School, and between the School and the wider community, that these values, and ways of interacting that are understood as corresponding with them, are learnt by staff and students such that they also influence individual and community wellbeing outside of the school grounds, and that students then use this way of being and communicating as a strength to support them in their lives beyond primary school. The Principal and the leadership team recognize the enormity of this aim, holding it up as a theoretical ideal and acknowledging that in practice "we can't always *live the Values*".

The Values at Southvale influence communication between staff, school-level decision-making, student behaviour management, communication between teachers and students and between students, and communication between the School and the school community. They also influence the processes which are used to establish norms of communication and behaviour, and further processes and strategies for maintaining them. Over time, a wide range of programs, practices and policies have been implemented that are supported by and which maintain a focus on the school values, and what started out as the purposeful implementation of ways of behaving has developed into a cultural change, where new members of the school are no longer formally inducted into the values, but are acculturated via their emersion in a school atmosphere that is characterised by the foregrounding of respectful and caring relationships.

Challenges to Assertive Discipline and the introduction of School Values

Dissatisfaction with the School's previous discipline policy (Code of Conduct 2001-2003) is a key feature of teachers' stories about the implementation of 'the Values' at Southvale. Prior to the implementation of 'the Values', behaviour management at Southvale was based on an Assertive Discipline model (Canter & Canter, 1976), where rules were set by each Grade at the beginning of each year, and consequences for particular behaviours were agreed upon. Then the teacher took primary responsibility for rewarding desirable behaviours and punishing undesirable behaviours. Many teachers claim that Assertive Discipline was not suitable for the children at Southvale and that it did not offer a solution to the problems they faced. Major criticisms of the Assertive Discipline model were its emphasis on extrinsic motivation and its lack of sensitivity to students' different needs and different levels of development. Of all the problems presented as impetuses for implementation of 'the Values', an explicit rejection of Assertive Discipline was most often cited by teachers in favour of an approach that developed skills in the students, with some

teachers seeing a focus on developing resilience in individuals as an alternative to Assertive Discipline.

The Assertive Discipline approach to behaviour management was formally removed from the School's Code of Conduct in 2003. References to rewards and punishments in the 2001-2003 document have been replaced in the 2003-5 document with explicit naming of the core values. It no longer refers to "consequences"; instead, it states, "To ensure everyone's rights and responsibilities are met and for the wellbeing of all, shared values are in place". A process is outlined for the revisiting of Values and "how we want to be treated" at the beginning of each year for each grade.

Integration into all functions of the School

Overtime, 'the Values' have been written into, or have co-opted, a range of programs running in the School. Programs like the Walking School Bus, the Breakfast Club and the Homework Club, are described by teachers and parents as being part of 'the Values' innovation. Evidence of the recruiting of mandatory school policies to 'the Values' can be seen in the embedding of a values curriculum and norms of communication into the School's 2003-2005 ISDES (Individual School's Drug Education Strategy) policy, which identifies the following (among others) as "strengths in our drug education programs":

- Values program – school wide;
- Develop resilience and self esteem strategies for whole school community;
- Community endorsement of school Values program;
- Walking School Bus; and,
- Parent meetings.

Both the Walking School Bus and the parent meetings have been explicitly aligned with 'the Values' in meetings and interviews. The "action plan" contained within the current ISDES policy provides evidence of the embedding of 'the Values' in this drug education policy, with implementation strategies listed including (among others):

- Ensure that drug education is covered annually and supports school Values;
- Implement a comprehensive curriculum based on school Values;
- Continue PD for school community;
- School Values displayed and presented at school assembly for school community – translated into Vietnamese and Cambodian;
- Community Liaison Officers working with parents; and,
- Information Session on school Values – Prep transition program.

Similarly, the School's Charter Priority 2003-2005 contains evidence of the embedding of the Values into policy and the co-opting of other programs by the Values innovation. Outcomes listed in the Charter Priority include:

- A common set of values for staff, students, parents and school community (Respect, Tolerance, Caring, Honesty and Self-Responsibility)
- Higher achievements in student self-management skills related to personal values and attributes, work habits and academic progress; and,

- Development of personal student digital portfolio.

The Principal and other members of the leadership team see ‘the Values’ as having a broad application, including to student learning. The development of students’ individual learning plans and personal digital portfolios is seen as a tool and an outcome of students’ self-responsibility and self-management. Strategies listed in the Charter Priority include:

- Incorporate the inclusion of Values, academic performance and work habits on the continuous assessment proforma;
- Extend the Values program so it encompasses all aspects of student self-management;
- Further extend the Negotiated Curriculum; and,
- Continue to use staff meetings to develop curriculum, pedagogies and values education.

At times, all of the activities and programs listed here have been described by members of the leadership team as part of the Values innovation. This absorption of existing and emerging initiatives into values education at Southvale reflects the Principal’s desire that ‘the Values’ inform, and be supported by, all activities in the school.

Starting with the teachers

A distinctive aspect to the implementation of ‘the Values’ at Southvale was that the process started with the teachers. DEST (2003) identified that one of the challenges of implementing school values is involving key stakeholders in the contextualisation of the values to the particulars of the school. At Southvale, the first group of stakeholders to be brought into ‘the Values’ were the teachers. Professional development and meeting times were dedicated to allowing the teachers to work through the details of how they wanted to be treated and to come to an agreement on norms of behaviour that are consistent with the School’s values. As well as time spent debating issues on-site, individual teachers attended a range of off-site professional development sessions and were then given the responsibility of mentoring their colleagues in issues and processes relevant to what the school was trying to achieve. Explicit discussion of ‘the Values’ and norms of behaviour also took place at School Council and at parent meetings.

Only after this work by the teachers were ‘the Values’ taken to the students. As discussed below, ‘buy in’ by the teachers, and the application of ‘the Values’ to their own professional relationships, is an ongoing challenge at Southvale, with the leadership team agreeing that implementing ‘the Values’ has proved to be easier for the students than it has been for the staff at the School.

From behaviour management to a school culture

Initial work with the students focused on explicit discussions and modelling of norms of behaviour, and on explicit unpacking of what the values mean and what they looked like in action. Some of this early work made use of worksheets that had been developed commercially outside of the School. Such worksheets were soon put aside, however, because they were seen by teachers to be too prescriptive and to move students through the core values too quickly, without allowing for the discussion

needed for students' to develop their own understandings and to develop a sense of ownership of 'the Values'.

During the first two years of the innovation, new students were explicitly inducted into the School and its values. However, over time, ways of behaving and interacting that are seen as consistent with 'the Values' have become normalised such that the culture in the School has changed and new students, instead of requiring explicit induction, are acculturated into the School, with most picking up the norms of behaviour in a very short time.

Positive outcomes of 'the Values'

Participants attribute a range of positive outcomes to the implementation of 'the Values', including improved relationships in the School, increased self-responsibility and self-reflection on the part of teachers and students, improved attitudes, and affects on curriculum, pedagogy and learning.

Improved relationships

'The Values' innovation at Southvale is in its third year. Data collected in the form of student, staff and parent interviews and observations suggest that 'the Values' have led to improved relationships in the school, specifically increased levels of honesty and trust between students and staff and between staff members, increased participation of parents in school-based activities, and increased involvement of students in decision-making about what classrooms look like and how they operate.

Discussions at staff meetings suggest that relationships between students and between students and staff members have improved markedly over the last three years to be more respectful and more caring. Many anecdotes were given of incidents where students have shown concern for the wellbeing of a teacher or one of their peers, or have taken responsibility for repairing hurt caused by their own actions against others.

Although discussion at staff meetings has recognised that improvements can still be made to staff relationships, anecdotes suggest that teachers in the school have become more caring and more open with each other.

Relationships between parents/guardians and the School have also improved. The Principal and teachers have received positive feedback from parents at teacher interviews. Many report that parents' orientation to the School has changed noticeably with them being more actively involved in the School community. In the past, parents rarely came into the School unless there was a problem. In particular, the parents from non-English speaking backgrounds did not have a pro-active voice in the school. A recent incident that illustrates the change that has taken place occurred at the school assembly. At the end of the assembly (where students had given performances), a group of NESB parents, of their own initiative, stood up and gave a speech in English to thank a teacher who had played music in the performance and also to thank a retiring teacher for the work she had done with children in the school.

Increased self-responsibility and self-reflection

The data also suggests that both staff and students have increased their use of self-evaluation and self-reflection. Both staff and students can cite instances where the values have not informed behaviour. These counter examples illustrate a mindfulness of what the values look like in practice and a willingness to self-assess.

This outcome is also supported by a decrease in incidence of serious student misdemeanours. In fact, the School does not keep data on serious misdemeanours anymore because there has not been a serious incident for a long time. Prior to the implementation of the Values, very serious incidents (such as fire lighting, bringing weapons to school, student self-mutilation and student thuggery) were common. However, no such incident has occurred in the past two years and student misdemeanours that do attract the attention of the Principal are far less serious, usually involving interpersonal squabbles that the students can repair themselves when prompted.

Student opinions are increasingly being sought to inform school-level decision making. For example, when the issue of “house points” and their inconsistency with the school’s discipline policy was raised at a staff meeting for discussion, a range of views were given by staff members as to the advantages and disadvantages of this system of reward. There was not a consensus on whether the practice of house points ought to continue. The staff voted to take the issue to the students. The issue was then discussed by students in each classroom and their opinions were surveyed. This process revealed that students perceived house points to be inconsistent with the School’s values and believed that they ought to be discontinued.

Improved attitudes

The data also suggests that students’ attitudes towards schooling and towards the School have improved, specifically in terms of sense of community and mutual respect in the School. For example, teachers report that perpetrators of misdemeanours are now more likely to express remorse. Children are now more willing to admit that they have done something and to say sorry to all that they have affected. Children are more able to undo interpersonal problems themselves, with minimal scaffolding provided by teachers.

Changes have been implemented so there is a better understanding within the School community of rationales for decisions made about the running of the School. This is particularly the case for staff members, who all receive summaries of data collected in the School and participate in discussions and decisions about improvements or changes to school practices. Opinion surveys administered to parents, students and teachers are increasingly more likely to elicit comments about the Values in the “Other comments” section, suggesting an increased awareness and increased profile of the innovation.

Affects on curriculum, pedagogy and learning

The Values have supported a move towards negotiated curricula, with an increased emphasis on student leadership and an increased role for student self-assessment. This is evidenced in the implementation of individualized learning plans, the development of student digital portfolios, an increased role for students in reporting back to parents, and the increased use of negotiation to determine the focus of students’ work. These initiatives are supported by the premise that, to learn effectively, students need to take responsibility for their own learning.

These changes pose challenges to traditional notions of what it means to be a teacher and what it means to teach, and therefore pose significant professional and personal challenges for the teaching staff at the school.

Challenges to the Values

There are two main types of challenges to ‘the Values’ at Southvale Primary School. There are issues that repeatedly arise and are discussed and that lead to further understanding of ‘the Values’, their application and their limitations, and there are more serious challenges are seen to threaten ‘the Values’.

An example of the former is the issue of defining and interpreting the core values in a multi-cultural environment. The problematic around this is discussed regularly at staff meetings and is recognised as an area requiring caution. Such discussions are usually quite generative, stressing the need for further initiatives that involve local community groups in the running of the School.

In terms of the later, more threatening challenges, there are two phenomena that threaten “the Values”: variation of teacher “buy in” and the fact that teachers are not perfect in their application of ‘the Values’ to their own behaviours.

Variation of teacher “buy in”

Although there is a high level of enthusiasm amongst the teaching staff at Southvale for ‘the Values’, there is variation in the extent to which teachers believe that the norms and processes that have been implemented are appropriate in the range of situations that confront teachers. There are a very small number of teacher who believe that there are some children for whom ‘the Values’ do not work as a behaviour management strategy. There are also staff members who believe that ‘the Values’ are for the children and are primarily about behaviour management, and who resist the application of ‘the Values’ to their own behaviours and professional relationships.

Teacher vulnerability

Teachers are human beings like the rest of us. Many of the teachers, when reflecting on their own practice, refer to occasions when they failed to use ‘the Values’, falling back on previous strategies and forms of interacting with students that are autocratic and rely on teachers’ power over students. Such strategies are seen by these teachers as being easy ways out of challenging encounters with students, strategies that might be avoided if they were more skilled at using ‘the Values’ or less prone to falling back on old habits when tired or under stress. The types of interactions with students and colleagues that are supported by Southvale’s values come more naturally to some teachers than to others. Some teachers reported that ‘the Values’ give them permission to treat students like they have always been inclined, as equals who warrant respect, concern and responsibility. While others found that the implementation of these types of relations with students required constant self-scrutiny and self-editing, and therefore a lot of emotional energy.

Success factors

The *Beyond the Pilot* project focused on determining how an innovation is sustained over time. Three main factors emerged from the data:

- The embedding of the innovation into school policies and processes;
- A network of maintenance activities that reinforce the centrality of the innovation to the operation of the school; and,

- The repeated reconstitution of the innovation to accommodate changing perceptions and needs.

Embedding the innovation into policy and processes

The embedding of the Values into school policy (eg. School Charter, Code of Conduct, drug education policy) has ensured that they are a reference point for a wide range of activities in the School. Similarly, decision-making processes that are seen as consistent with the Values (eg. consensus decision making, consultation with parents and students, and asking ‘why?’) have been institutionalised such that other ways of operating would not be acceptable to staff or students.

Maintenance activities

Because the Values innovation is heavily dependent on the work of human actors, a considerable effort must be made by key actors in the maintenance of the innovation. The main foci of maintenance are activities with staff, activities with students, and the induction of new members. Underpinning these is a continual reconstitution of the innovation. Maintenance activities with staff include explicit discussion and workshopping of the Values as staff meetings and professional development sessions, reference to the Values in meetings that are not explicitly about the Values, and the surveying of staff to elicit feedback on the Values. These activities create a sense that the Values innovation is a work-in-progress in which everyone has a say and a stake. The Values are also embedded in policy documents that are supposed to inform teachers’ work practices. These activities work to repeatedly bring the Values to the centre of the work of the School.

Maintenance activities with students include direct instruction, modelling, and the surveying of students to elicit feedback on the Values.

Induction of new members was initially a formalised process where the Principal would work with new students, staff members or student teachers to explore the question – “How do I want to be treated?” and to discuss what the Values were and what they looked like in practice. However, overtime, formal induction processes have become less necessary because new members of the School adopt the norms of the School through exposure to them in interactions with others.

Reconstitution of the innovation

Since its initiation, the Values innovation has undergone continual reconstitution that has led to a review of the core values, a renewed focus on self-responsibility, a shift from a focus on discipline to a focus on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, a shift from using Y-charts to explore what the values are to using restorative justice processes as a way of applying the values, and a shift away from a focus on student behaviour to the inclusion of staff behaviour. These changes are seen as improvements in the innovation, but they are also seen as necessary for sustaining a high level of energy and commitment around the innovation.

The continual review of the innovation contributes its sustainability by creating a sense that it is open for negotiation, that it is responsive and that everyone who is willing to contribute can have a say in its development. The dynamism of the innovation means that it has not stagnated, nor has it decreased in relevance, as it has been reshaped to accommodate changing priorities and discourses in the School.

Conclusions and broader implications

Southvale Primary School has endeavoured to take a consultative, whole-school approach to values education, where core values are taken as a starting point and a measure of all functions of, and relationships in, the School. We have identified a number of factors that contribute to the success and longevity of ‘the Values’ at Southvale. The data collected at Southvale supports some of the existing research on values education, such as the importance of a school ethos that is consistent with the values (Halstead & Taylor, 1998), congruence between the espoused values and those seen to be practiced, and teachers’ ownership of the values (Prosser & Deakin, cited in DEST, 2003; Ling et al., 1998), and the fact that values cannot be imposed on students, but must be developed and owned (Edgar, et al., 2002).

Contrary to the Prime Minister’s claim that public schools are “too values-neutral”, the 2003 DEST review of values education programs in Australia concedes that “teachers are inevitably involved in the transmission and/or development of values, and that a school cannot be assumed to be ‘values free’ environments” (DEST, 2003, p.33). In an empirical study of two ‘middle’ and ‘ordinary’ Australian high schools, McLeod and Yates (2000) found that the attitudes, skills and dispositions of students were affected by the ethos of their schools, with very different outcomes being produced by seemingly similar school contexts (McLeod & Yates, 2000). We do not need to articulate an explicit values education program to produce values in our students. For this reason, we believe it is imperative that school communities *do* articulate, and undertake discussions about, their values, and about the types of skills, attitudes and dispositions that they wish to produce in their graduates. This is an imperative: “Education cannot be divorced from its connection to emerging multicultural dynamics that shape the context of society in general and education in particular. Contextual factors among persons such as race, ethnicity, culture, social class, and disability give rise to creative dilemmas that must be considered in schooling” (Edgar et al., 2002, p.235).

The story of Southvale’s values contains lessons in implementing school values, but it also contains more general lessons in sustainable school innovation. Citing Goodlad, Edgar et al. (2002) discuss differences between *school reform* – where imperatives are imposed on schools, and *school renewal* –

[where schools], with input from outside constituents and diverse communities, engage in a deliberative process of evaluating and changing school practices in a collaborative manner. Rather than having some predetermined plan in mind, those engaged in renewal start with dialogue across diverse groups and deliberation to refine common problems through cross-group collaboration and mutually chosen solutions that address these problems (p.239).

Using Goodlad’s terminology, Southvale has undergone a *renewal*. Interviews with staff in particular, suggest that other approaches to implementing ‘the Values’ would not have worked at this school.

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