



REINVIGORATING PLAY IS THE WAY®

By Wilson McCaskill

Your school would *not* be unusual if it invested in PITW some years ago only to find that the initial enthusiasm for its philosophy and practice of behaviour education has waned and although it served you well back then it serves you little now.

Perhaps it's time to find those resources again, dust off that equipment you purchased and remind your school community that *independent, self-motivated, self-managing, empathetic, lifelong learners* is the goal and then reinvigorate Play Is The Way. After all, when you first started PITW good things did happen and the kids did get it.

With the benefit of hindsight there are likely very few reasons to think that reinvigorating PITW in your school would not achieve more than before, if only because you can avoid any weakness in your previous implementation.

Besides, school leaders can't address the mental health and well being of students without addressing the mental health and well being of teachers. With estimates that 1 in 4 teachers in Australia are suffering from mental exhaustion, there needs to be a mental health and well being pay off for teachers if they are going to buy into teaching.

Now maybe the ideal time to make your earlier investment in PITW really pay off by driving it to a long lasting benefit in the mental health and well being of students and teachers.

It is not easy to protect a school wide process from the ravages of staff turnover, leadership change and the very human tendency to become complacent with things done frequently and regularly.

Additionally, the smorgasbord of positive behaviour programs that arrive in schools via conferences, new staff, You Tube and email promotions offer the chance to re-enthusiase staff with the *next big thing*. The old adage, "A change is as good as a holiday," holds true for many schools and *program hopping* can elevate energy and create a promising bubble of enthusiasm and collective unity.

Invariably, this bubble is subjected to the same forces of decay as previous bubbles and often shrinks to a sad and sorry representation of its former self.

Experience tells us that it take about 2 years for the PITW bubble to sag. School leaders, who have managed to maintain PITW as an effective behaviour education philosophy and practice in their school for longer than 2 years (some for as long as a decade), have backed up the initial enthusiasm of staff with strategic, controlled and well paced implementation.



These leaders understood that *enthusiasm is often the killer of effectiveness*. They held back the desire of staff to rush ahead and immediately employ what they picked up in the PITW workshop. They ensured there was adequate time for preparation, study and analysis before implementation. They were forewarned by the advice offered in the *PITW Implementation Guide* and had either assembled a PITW Action team (frequently called a well being team) or were ready to do so immediately after the initial workshop.

Working alongside the action team they made certain staff had easy access to the resources to help embed the knowledge and philosophy that would sustain and maintain fidelity of implementation.

The essential basic planning and organisation of equipment, play and timetable space to deliver PITW was undertaken while teachers were asked not to play games or use the self-reflective language until the groundwork to match the needs and context of the school to PITW were addressed.

Further, the action team was given time to dig deep into the resources to enable them to be the well informed team of go-to people that could guide both the growth of teachers and PITW in the school.

Good manners was the focus for the whole school community and the “Welcome To The Unknown” strategy was universally employed along with a commitment to embed self-regulation techniques and the understanding of the Life Raft concepts. Some schools embed all the concepts before starting the games; others will put the Golden Rule in place and perhaps one or two others.

During this process staff will have been familiarising themselves with a sufficient number of games to keep themselves in front of the process and confident in working with the issues that might occur when played by students. The “rotational system” of conducting games, as explained in the Implementation Guide, is often adopted because it reduces the workload on staff and exposes students to a greater variety of games.

PITW’s longevity within a school undoubtedly depends on strategic planning that is informed by an understanding of the educators that will employ it, and the many and varied characteristics of the school community in which it will grow. Having a competent and dedicated action team allows propulsion to be maintained even with changes of staff. Additionally, new teachers can be given experienced and informed mentoring to bring them up to speed as well as being sent to a PITW one-day workshop.

Astute leaders will even ensure that structures and personnel be put in place to avoid any loss of momentum if they were to leave. These leaders are also aware that teachers will want to return to operant conditioning, behaviour management programs, when they become tired from the challenges of behaviour education. Overcoming this desire is usually best done by self-generated professional development that is informed by the PITW resources and delivered by the action team and/or leadership.



Staff needs to be nourished by information, experienced guidance and collegiate support, along with enthusiastic and inspirational reminders of why behaviour education matters and what makes it superior to behaviour management. It is here that an optimistic and passionate action team, supported by knowledgeable and skillful school leaders becomes the essential ingredients of sustainability.

The filter of *independent, self-managing, self-motivated learners*, soon separates behaviour management programs from those of behaviour education. Independent, self-managing, self-motivated learners are not dependent upon the opinion of others for their self-esteem and are prepared for the challenges of living responsibly and ethically in a free and liberal democracy. Their educators had the stamina and resolve to stick to the course and make the development of character and decency both a priority and an entrenched habit of behaviour.

1. WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GOOSE IS GOOD FOR THE GANDER

It will be motivational, insightful and informative to ask staff to look at each Life Raft concept and consider its importance in their own teaching practice. Although designed to guide the behaviour of students the concepts are no less powerful in guiding the professional and personal conduct of educators.

Pinning each concept onto a large sheet of butcher's paper and triggering a debate about the guidance and challenges that each places on the adults of the school community, stimulates a strong empathetic response for students who must daily rise to the challenges of living and learning in accordance with the concepts.

Asking staff to attach sticky notes under each concept with an observation, statement of intent, reminder-to-self or personal directive makes each sheet of butchers paper a rich and often transformative presence in the staff room.

Collating this fertile information into a few sheets of A4 for distribution and personal contemplation is a further fruitful step.

Children, quite rightly, hate hypocrisy and any suggestion that teachers do not live by the same high moral standards being asked of their students inevitably leads to a loss of trust and fractured teacher/student relationships. This activity ensures that neither goose nor gander can attest that more is asked of one than the other.

(See attached photos)

2. LIFE RAFT INSPIRED SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES



Bring the *Life Raft* concepts to the forefront of your school community's thinking by asking all classes to prepare an entire assembly presentation around a chosen *Life Raft* poster. Having selected their poster, which should not be the same as that of another class unless repetitions are unavoidable, the class devises a creative piece that shows the value and importance of the concept. Additionally, it may be possible for some students to share their personal stories about the influence of the concept on them and/or the class.

It can be very powerful for the assembly item to end by the students handing out small cards with their favourite saying or maxim to each member of the audience. This saying should relate to the concept and help to deepen the audiences understanding of the concept. This assembly project will encourage all classes to probe a concept in more depth and tie the teacher and the class into the challenge of presenting an assembly item that is both educational and entertaining.

3. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASSESSMENT

Ask all teachers to run a social and emotional assessment of their class by using the assessment sheets in the PITW [Implementation Guide](#). If you want to do this please contact us and we will forward an electronic version (fillable PDFs) of the assessment sheets. This will provide valuable and detailed information and give every teacher a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the children in their care. We would strongly recommend doing this on a regular basis.

4. STAFF DRIVEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Break staff into small groups determined by the area in which they operate (junior, middle, upper) or create mixed groups if this would be more stimulating. Then ask each group to take it in turns to supply a short professional development session (10 mins or so) for their colleagues at staff meetings. The subject matter for each PD is to be based on either an article from the *Professional Development section of Volume 1* (red manual) or from *Children Aren't Made Of China*.

Groups can either select their own topic from the resources or the heading of each article can be drawn from a hat. If the groups are small (3 members) it maybe easier for them to meet and collaborate on how the topic will be shared between them when opportunity permits. You might want to suggest that each group should try to give real life examples of the article's content in action (or lack of action) in their own classrooms. This strategy will bring social and emotional learning into every staff meeting. Time for questions will have to be included.

5. TOPIC OF CONVERSATION

Get 3 jars and mark them junior, middle and upper primary or by the years that constitute those levels. Write the names of every student in each of those levels on separate pieces of paper and place them in the appropriate jars. Once a week at a staff meeting or a lunch gathering (that all staff have agreed to attend for this purpose) you draw one name from each of the jars. The children selected are the topic of conversation and their classroom teacher kicks things off by giving a



verbal printout of the child's social and emotional competencies (behaviour) in all areas of life and learning within the school.

Other members of staff, who have contact with this child, add to the picture as well as those who may have any additional information from any source. As there will be 3 students to discuss, staff should keep their comments brief but informative. This is a very good way to see which children are close to being invisible and which children maybe or are carrying the burden of a reputation. In this process it is important that all staff are actively listening and honouring the fact that a whole and living member of the school community is being discussed. After a child has been selected their name is not returned to the jar.

6. GROWING PERSONALLY AND SOCIALLY (GPS)

Often, when lethargy and loss of motivation creeps in, it is the excitement of a new and considerable challenge that is needed to rekindle the fire in the belly. Perhaps it is time, for as many teachers as are willing, to start the implementation of our *Growing Personally and Socially strategy (GPS)* which can be found in our *Enrichment Manual (volume 3)*. This is a very powerful and beneficial way to hold classroom conferences that deepen personal and social capabilities.

Students respond strongly to the process and once embedded it will become a regular and enriching process for the class. [The Enrichment Manual can be ordered on our website](#). It will guide you through the final 3 elements of PITW and show you just how far and deep social and emotional learning can go. Teachers need support as they train their classes in the strategy. It would be wise to involve teachers who have a real feel for PITW and see real value in children learning to solve their own problems and in turn supporting the members of their community who may be struggling. Your PITW action team would be prime candidates for a GPS trial.

Perhaps an objective could be to have all classes using GPS in a year from the initial trial date. A big ask but the profit will be well worth the effort and as each teacher masters the process, the positive feedback will hopefully motivate those who may lack the confidence and energy to step into the challenges of the unknown.

7. ROTATIONAL SYSTEM

If your school is not using the rotational system, as described in the *PITW Implementation Guide*, for holding games sessions you may find that going to this method will shake the cobwebs out and freshen the delivery of teachers.

It will also make teachers more conscious of the differences and similarities between classes. If staff are reluctant to go down this path then conducting a trial of the process will generate the information that might inspire hesitant teachers to step out of their comfort zones.



Schools often use the rotational system to build a better staff awareness of the student community and to create a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by their colleagues, as well as expose students to a greater number and variety of teachers.

8. USING MAXIMS

Each week a different staff member brings in a maxim or saying that has some special relevance in their life or they find helpful or inspiring. They share this with staff. They explain what it means to them and then display it a prominent position with an invitation for all staff to share and discuss the maxim with their classrooms, when the opportunity presents itself, in the hope it might guide and/or inspire student behaviour.

Teachers should also be invited to share, with their colleagues, the moment when the maxim proved useful in the classroom. This strategy encourages teachers to be more observant of their classrooms and seize the teachable moment for behavior education.

9. STUDENT INSPIRED GAMES

Teachers can ask students to create their own game. It can't be exactly like another game and it must be able to be played by everyone in the class, in either teams or as the whole class. If a game requires taking turns this must occur fairly quickly so that there's not much idle time for classmates. Equipment that is readily available may be used or no equipment at all. Of course the game must not put people at undue risk.

Additionally, the students devising the game must know which *Life Raft* posters are most relevant to the game and which virtues from the *Pathway To Empathy* poster will be most required. Students should be encouraged to maintain a social and emotional learning focus in their search for a new game.

Each team of students (no more than 5 per team would be my suggestion) could be asked to write the game up, give it a name and then be invited to teach it to the class as well as umpire the game and lead any discussions and analysis that result from the game. Participating students could be asked to evaluate the game from an SEL perspective and propose modifications or additions they think would improve the game.

This would be an effective way to introduce new games and create greater student ownership of the learning process. Every game that proves effective could be compiled into a manual of school specific games. Students could even create a universal template for the lay out of the games that everyone follows thereby ensuring design consistency and clarity.

10. TEACHER INSPIRED GAMES



Perhaps you could also tempt teachers to break into teams and create games for inclusion in the manual. These could be tested at staff meetings before being introduced to children. Teachers of course will be more specific about the social and emotional learning within the games they create and better able to create the variations that can cater for various age ranges.

11. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Reading the [Implementation Guide](#) can be of great help no matter how far along the Play Is The Way® journey your school may be. It may also surprise you in the clarity it offers and will assist in delivering PITW with fidelity rather than the less effective SLI (Something Like It).

Hopefully, you can *adapt, adjust and apply* the preceding ideas to work effectively within the context of your school. They will trigger even more ideas that reinvigorate your staff and help them overcome the fatigue that strikes all of us at some point in our climb to the top of imposing mountains.

Teachers can rekindle their enthusiasm for behaviour education by reminding themselves of the benefits it will bring to the lives of children beyond the boundaries of the classroom and school. It also helps to acknowledge what the school has achieved since starting PITW. This is where a social and emotional learning assessment can be invaluable.