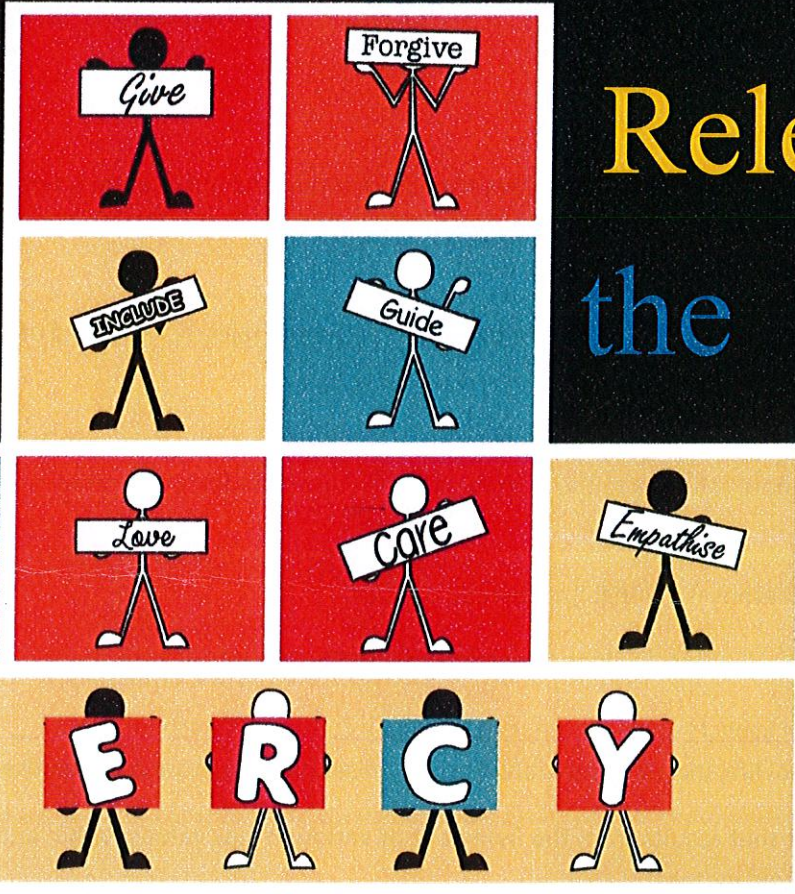


Making Mercy A VERB

Releasing
the Potential
of the
Mercy
School



Handouts

Releasing the Potential

These handouts draw on materials arising from a field study conducted in different types of schools, both in the North and in the South of Ireland as part of a Culture and Ethos Project, directed by the Marino Institute of Education, Ireland.

The purpose of this exercise is to enable schools to access, articulate and apply ethos values.

Value Sets

The ethos value set is a synthesis of fundamental values from both inside and outside the school. However these values have to be adopted and lived out in the life and culture of the school before they can be called **ethos values**.

There are many values offered to the school. Some are adopted and some rejected. The kind of school and the kind of ethos depend upon the set of values adopted.

If the founding values of the Mercy school are included in the **ethos value set**, then one can call the school a Mercy school. The school is Mercy to the degree that the values of Mercy education are represented in the value set.

The creation and sustaining of ethos is an ongoing process.

Ethos is the resultant set of fundamental values adopted and lived by the school community.

These values drive the various aspects and elements of the school culture. The school culture permeates all aspects of school life, including relationships, organisational structure and practises.

Ethos is also the special spirit that results from the living out of various ethos values within and through all aspects of the school culture.

One can experience the result of the implementation of the ethos value set.

As a result of living out of values:

- People behave in certain ways,
- certain structures are put in place or are missing,
- people are treated in certain ways.

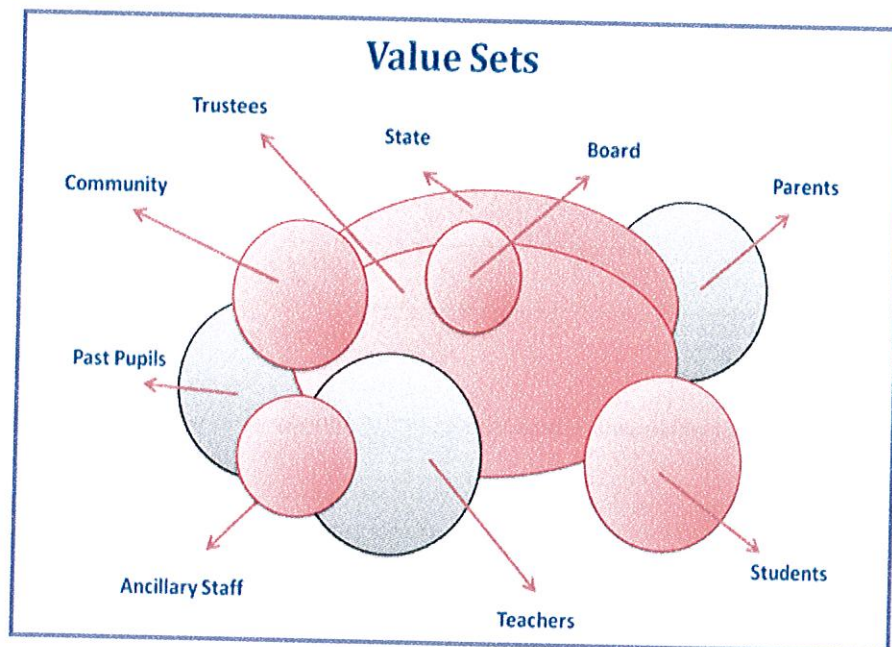
Because ethos values can be explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious, the work of articulating them and describing them is necessary in order to make them all explicit and conscious to the school community.

This is a cyclical process. New values are added to the set while others are rejected as the members of the school community respond in creative ways to their environment and experiences of life and learning in the school. This is why ethos is difficult to describe but easier to experience.

When one engages in a formal process of making ethos values conscious and explicit, it is possible over time to have more agreement between the formally adopted ethos value set and the actual one that drives school culture and is in turn created by school culture.

When the majority of the school community consent to implement and live by a shared ethos value set, then there is great unity of purpose and harmony. In an environment like this

- Students learn better,
- Teachers teach better,
- There is less need for tight control structures by the school management.



A method of making Values explicit

Access through a Questionnaire on School Culture & Ethos

Questionnaire

Educational Philosophy

What educational principles guide the daily life of the school? (Name 3 at most)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Religious/Moral Philosophy

What religious/moral principles guide the daily life of the school? (Name 3 at most)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Image/Identity of school

Could you say three things of which your school is most proud and say what values are implied in them?

- a. _____ Values _____
- b. _____ Values _____
- c. _____ Values _____

What values are implied in the way the rooms and space in the school are utilised? (Name 3 at most)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Why do you think parents send their sons/daughters to this school? (name 3 at most)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Symbols, Icons, Emblems

What symbols and signs do you see in the school that represents important school values?

Please state what these values are.

a. _____ Value _____

b. _____ Value _____

c. _____ Value _____

Rituals

What rituals and ceremonies take place in the school that represent important School values?

Please state what these values are.

a _____ Value _____

b _____ Value _____

c _____ Value _____

Tradition

What traditional practises in the school represent important school values?

Please state what these values are.

a. _____ Value _____

b _____ Value _____

c _____ Value _____

Changing Values

From the history and stories you have heard about the school, what values were important in the past that are not present now?

a _____

b _____

c _____

Toxic Values

What attitudes/norms or behaviours exist in this school that make it difficult

(Teachers) for you to fulfil your professional role?

(Students) for you to be a good student and/or develop your personality?

(Parent) for your son/daughter to be a good student and/or develop their personality?

(Board) for students to be good students and/or to develop their personalities?

- a _____
- b _____
- c _____

Positive Values

What attitudes/norms of behaviour exists in this school that

(Teachers) make it easy for you to fulfil your professional role?

(Students) make it easy for you to learn and develop your personality

(Parents) help your son/daughter to be a good student and/or develop their personality?

(Board) help students to be good students and/or develop their personalities?

- a _____
- b _____
- c _____

School Organisation/School Management/Formal Curriculum

Internal Communications

What are the main beliefs that guide the following areas in your school?

School Management _____

School Organisation _____

Curriculum Content _____

Internal communications system/relationship with parents/ _____

Teaching and Learning:

What are the main beliefs that guide the teaching approach in your school?

Pastoral care system and discipline:

What are the main beliefs that guide the following areas in your school?

Pastoral care system _____

Discipline _____

Personal and Social Development of Students.

Could you name 3 things that the school values most in students?

a _____

b _____

c _____

Personal and Social Development of Teachers

Could you name 3 things the school values most in teachers?

Internal Community Relationships and Relationship with Parents

What beliefs, assumptions underpin the following sets of relationships?

a. Teachers and Teachers _____

b. Teachers and Students _____

c. Students and Students _____

d. Teachers and Parents _____

Relationship with wider community

What are the main beliefs that guide the links with the wider community in your school?

What value do the state Examinations contribute to your school?

DEFINITIONS

Ethos

Ethos refers to the **unique set of values** that drives all aspects that drives all aspects of a school culture and also to the resultant **experience** that a person in the school lives through as a result of the ethos values being acted upon and put into practice in the daily life of the school.

It is the **experience** that matters. It is the **quality and kind of experience** that is crucial.

Culture:

Culture is the shared patterns of **behaviour, relationships, structures, traditions and symbols** which provide **meaning** for members of the school community. These patterns have been invented and discovered over time, have worked well, are considered valid, and are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel. **Culture guides how people are encouraged to be and to act.**

Values (Principles, Beliefs, Standards)

Values represent consensus about what is worthy of desire.

Values express what is important, what people care about.

Beliefs:

Beliefs are consciously held cognitive views about truth and reality.

Beliefs represent core understandings about issues in school life.

Assumptions

Assumptions are a preconscious system of beliefs, perceptions and values that guide behaviour.

Norms

Norms are the standards and principles that are enforced by social pressures.

Norms develop formally and informally as the staff discover and reinforce particular ways of acting and interacting.

Symbols

Symbols represent intangible cultural values and beliefs. They give meaning and influence behaviour.

List of Culture and Ethos School Areas

A list of key areas in schools which determine school culture and ethos

1. Myth/Vision
2. Religious/Moral Philosophy
3. Educational Philosophy
4. Symbols/Icons/ Emblems
5. Rituals and Ceremonies
6. Traditions/Histories/Stories
7. Buildings/Space/Place
8. School Organisation
9. School Management
10. Formal Curriculum
11. Internal Community relationships
12. Personal and Social Development of Students
13. Personal and Social Development of Teachers
14. Pastoral Care System
15. Discipline
16. Teaching and learning Methodology
17. Relationship with parents
18. Relationship with External Community
19. Relationship with State Educational Department
20. Image/Identity of School

The Catholic/Mercy School

The Catholic/Mercy school loses its purpose without constant reference to the Gospel and to the founding intention of Catherine McAuley. It derives all the energy necessary from its educational work from Christ and thus creates in the community an atmosphere permeated with the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. In this setting, the student experiences his/her dignity as a person before knowing its definitions.

(Kavanagh: The Catholic School, 1977)

Characteristics of a Catholic/Mercy School

1. It is a faith community, Gospel values are reflected in policies, structures and in the relationships of Members.
2. It teaches models of Christian living.
3. It is geared towards the total development of the person.
4. It enhances the dignity of each person. Its structures are liberating. It tolerates failure. There is commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation.
5. It has a special orientation towards the poor.
6. It teaches that education is a call to service and not merely a means of getting material prosperity.
7. It values openness, justice, compassion and peace.
8. It seeks truth. It therefore values tolerance of different views and the ability to judge critically.
9. It teaches hopefulness. The world can be renewed, regenerated. Remember Catherine's ability to imagine things differently.
10. It values authentic liberation. Persons should be free from fear, from self absorption, from despair, from consumerism and petty ambition.

Characteristics of Effective Schools

- ***Professional Leadership***

Firm, purposeful and participative

- ***Shared vision and goals***

Unity of purpose, constancy of practice, collegiality and co-operation

- ***A learning environment***

Orderly environment conducive to learning

- ***Concentration on teaching and learning***

Academic emphasis, focus on achievement

- ***Purposeful teaching***

Structured lessons, clarity of purpose, adaptive practice

- ***High expectations***

Intellectual challenge provided, high expectations communicated

- ***Positive reinforcement***

Focus on praise and on encouragement, constructive feedback

- ***Monitoring progress***

Systematic monitoring of performance, formative evaluation

- ***Pupil rights and responsibilities***

Boosting of self esteem, learning to be responsible

- ***Home-school partnership***

Parental involvement, co-operation and consultation

- ***A learning organisation***

Focus on on-going improvement and staff development

Characteristics of Positive School Cultures

- A mission focussed on student and teacher learning.
- School leadership that values continuity and improvement.
- A rich sense of history and purpose.
- Core values of collegiality and improvement.
- Positive beliefs and assumptions about the potential of students and staff to learn and grow.
- A professional community that uses knowledge, experience and research to improve practice.
- An informed communications network that fosters positive attitudes.
- Rituals and ceremonies that reinforce core cultural values.
- Stories that celebrate success.
- A physical environment that symbolizes joy and pride.
- A widely shared sense of respect and caring for everyone.

Characteristics of Toxic Cultures

- They become focused on negative values.
- They become fragmented. Meaning is derived from subculture membership, anti student sentiments or life outside work.
- They become almost exclusively destructive. Teachers and staff spend their energies protecting themselves, or withholding participation.
- They become spiritually fractured. There may be a lack of any sense of integrity.
- Few positive relationships exist between adults.
- Staff may feel personally lost, pessimistic or discouraged.
- In toxic schools, elements of school culture reinforce negativity.
- Negative values and beliefs hold sway.
- Powerful network members become negaholics.

Roles in Toxic Cultures

- There are **saboteurs** whose main purpose is to prevent change and innovation.
- **Pessimistic storytellers** who remind the staff of failures, unresolved problems and lost opportunities.
- **Negative historians** who reduce staff commitment by reminding everybody of all of the problems that developed while introducing new curricula in the past.

