

retirement message from Ruth Still...



Ruth Still (pictured right)
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In the many roles I had throughout my career in public education- teacher, special educator, school counsellor, leader in equity/ student services coordinator, investigator in child protection and manager in student wellbeing/ behaviour, student counselling I have tried to better the educational outcomes- not just academic but social, emotional, physical, spiritual, the mental health and wellbeing of all students.

Very early in my career as a school counsellor I realised I could drain the swamp (for example training the student welfare team in a school in interviewing skills) as well as kill the crocodiles (endless students to see at my office door)- that it didn't need to me going to every serious incident in the then Metropolitan West region but that the school counselling workforce along with principals and other teachers could be trained in the management of such incidents and school counsellors be provided with ongoing resourcing, research-based skill development in dealing with the psychological effects of traumatic events. This good practice is documented and updated continuously in the school counsellor manual.

The values I believe I demonstrated throughout my career include:
Firstly in social justice- a fair go for all – all students need the opportunity for good educational outcomes to have a better future- good teaching, good programs.

This girl who wanted to know more about Aboriginal culture in Warren in the '50's when I saw my clothes going out to Beemunal and was told by my parents I could not mix with them at school, became the girl who then as now is determined to learn more about Aboriginal ways of being, in particular developing cultural competence, I'm proud to be called a titta girl by my Aboriginal friends. In a similar way my parents were somewhat taken aback that I would teach children with disabilities- I don't shy away from challenges, or difference whether it is disability, race, culture, sexuality – it is something to be celebrated and accommodated.

“I value the collegiality, thinking, planning, research, evidence base for good practice...”

Secondly-the right for women to learn, succeed, have a career not just a job. Our daughters are both teachers and I am enormously proud of them.

Thirdly - developing excellence- by generalising good practice examples into systems improvements (draining the swamp) being strategic- keeping the school counsellor manual well researched, practical sound advice with professional learning for others whether it is serious incident management, supervision practices- peer consultation,

psychological harm including risk of suicide, mental health and wellbeing, autism, legal requirements- privacy etc with writing with the Australian Psychological Society- Psychologists in Schools reference group, role statements on lifespan with the Psychology Board of Australia, functional assessment, supporting students with a refugee background in rural NSW and supporting students who are also carers. This helps maintain the excellent standard of practice in the school counselling service and flows onto the teaching service. My career attests to my courage in getting on the front foot, being an advocate at all levels for sound, evidence based psychological advice be it organisational, counselling, developmental, educational practice in the bureaucracy, with government agencies and peak organisations and not being afraid of action.

Fourthly- leading and managing teams. **Team** has been key to all the programs involving me.

The collaboration, shared ideas, professional expertise coming from our different professional skills and knowledge has meant the project whole is greater than the sum of the parts; be it the collaboration with The Childrens' Hospital Westmead, NSW Ministry of Health- MH Kids- School-Link Initiative, Community Services- GOT IT, Ageing and Disability- Autism and challenging students and NSW Department of Education and Communities staff, particularly its school counselling workforce has benefitted from the expertise of paediatricians, clinical psychologists, doctors, social workers, speech therapists and other allied health professionals.

I value the collegiality, thinking, planning, research, evidence base for good practice and good humour in the development of professional learning, joint agency supervision structures, better delivery of services to some of our most challenging students and families when health, education and community services are working in collaboration. Many of the school health surveys carried out by the Ministry of Health inform the directions the School-Link Initiative in particular takes. Recently the shared care schedule was released jointly by both departments and it is hoped the directions flagged in the schedule will mean better access to and from health care services. I am grateful for the many opportunities I have had to lead and manage many aspects of the School-Link Initiative and wish everyone involved, continuing success in the evolving directions it will take. ●