



Strengths and Weaknesses

By Wilson McCaskill

The crucial role that schools play in the socialising of children has been startlingly apparent since COVID restrictions ceased across the country and school once again became a regular and dependable part of daily life. Few teachers would say that behaviour improved while students spent extended periods of time away from school.

In the many games sessions we facilitated in various schools this year, we noticed a significant increase in emotional fragility, undue sensitivity and a propensity to be offended without much cause, as well as a willingness to see malice in the words and actions of others when none was intended. Additionally, there's been a marked loss of a sense of humour and quickness to tears when laughter would have been the expected and better alternative.

During these sessions, I placed a copy of the Life Raft posters on the ground and asked students to gather around the concept they believed was their strength and the one they role modelled on a daily basis. The two concepts that most gathered around were the red poster (Pursue Your Personal Best) and the green poster (Be Brave – Participate To Progress)

Interestingly, when I asked those who had gathered around the red poster to really think about whether or not they pursued their personal best, *no matter who they worked with*, significant numbers moved away from the red poster with most deciding to gather around the green poster instead.

When asked to gather around the poster they considered to be their weakness most students gathered around the blue poster (Have Reasons For The Things You Say And Do) with the greatest number gathering around the orange poster (The Golden Rule - Treat Others As You Want Them To Treat You).

That so many children found themselves lacking in the daily expression of the Golden Rule surely points to the enormous challenge of living to the demands of this rule and the very real need to ensure it stays at the forefront of behavioural guidance. It's called the Golden Rule for a reason and we forget its vital significance to humanity at our peril.

Perhaps it's worth trying the same activity in your class and using it to stimulate a robust and honest discussion about the challenges and importance of the Life Raft concepts in every area of our lives. With only a few weeks left in the school year it may also show you, which concept/s students need to revisit and strengthen before their next long absence from school.