Southern Cross – Making it Real

Southern Cross training succeeds due to a combination of factors, including the tools of the training, the teams from each school, the time away from school and a readiness to do things differently. With these factors in place, the training can build momentum in schools and propel them into action, sometimes beyond initial intentions.

Here are a collection of insights from Principals about the Southern Cross program and how it has helped their schools.

**Tools Learnt through the Training ...**

**Little Yarra Steiner School** sought to rectify its systems for paying music tuition fees. Through mapping out the problems, the team was able to simplify the issues so that they were more manageable. ‘The first major insight was realising that the overall problem was not a particular person’s fault, but a problem in the process,’ said the school’s Education Manager, Jean-Michel David. ‘We learnt that all parties needed common and accurate information, and that that would help us to cut down the number of steps in the invoicing and billing processes.’

The goal of **Albury Wodonga Community College’s** Southern Cross project was to raise the retention rate for students to 75 per cent in 2012. The tools learnt by the Albury Wodonga Community College team challenged their assumptions and enabled them to use data for decision making. The tools that they found most effective were the 5 Whys and the ‘Cause and Effect’ (Fishbone) diagram.

‘Early in our training, we realised we needed to identify the parameters of our project,’ said the Principal of **Bayside Christian College**, Lorraine Hook. ‘That took us a good day and a half. The Southern Cross facilitator was really helpful. We learnt to keep the parameters fairly simple during the training and then go beyond that afterwards.’ The school’s project was to align the school’s mission statement, values and vision.
The training showed **Ilam College** of Australia Inc the tools to implementing a plan once a decision had been made. The Principal displayed an implementation plan poster not just in her office but in the staffroom so that people could see, at a glance, how the school was heading towards the first day of classes at its new campus in Glenroy. "The implementation plan poster made things a lot less overwhelming," said Principal Aynur Simsirel. "Often all you had to do was add a post-it note to show we had progressed another step."

The Southern Cross training showed **Mt Hira College** that it needed to focus on data collection and analysis. The College combed over several years of attendance records and looked beyond the assumption that long family holidays were at the heart of its attendance problem. "We looked at the days of the week of absences, the students' teachers, the genders of the absentees. In a way, we made things harder for ourselves, but it was worth it," said Principal Patricia Gay. "We learnt that we really needed to get as much information as possible."

The team from **Plenty Valley International Montessori School** found that it needed data, lots of data, about enrolment and retention. It adhered to the popular DMAIC process: define, measure, analyse, improve and control. "These five phases helped us to break down the issues," said Principal Dr Maree Matthews. "They provided us with a process, a map, as we asked ourselves, 'Why are some students leaving?'"

**St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College** found defining the scope and terminology of its project, introducing an Enhanced Learning Program across its secondary division, a very important step. Defining the terminology ensured that everyone had clarity on what needed to be done. The Southern Cross tools also assisted the team in identifying and understanding their stakeholders. The team developed a process to engage and begin working with their community to advance the College to meet the community's needs.

"One of the key concepts we learnt to calculate was whether or not something added value," said the Reports Coordinator of **Belgrave Heights Christian School**, Steve Reiher. "We learnt that the amount of time and effort report comments cost was significantly higher than the value they presented, especially since everything that could be communicated to parents in their children's reports could be portrayed in the graphs and grades."
Team Selection

Southern Cross recommends teams of between four and seven staff members for each school. Here are some examples of the various combinations.

Seven senior staff from **Ilim College** of Australia Inc attended the Southern Cross training to tackle the issue of expanding to a second campus: the Principal, the primary school Vice-Principal, the primary school Curriculum Coordinator, the secondary school Teaching and Learning Coordinator, the secondary school Students Services Manager, the college Accountant and a Board Member. ‘It was a good mixture,’ said Principal Aynur Simsirel. ‘We differed in our opinions and had some lively debates.’

Keen for staff buy-in to future changes about meeting schedules and distribution of information, the Principal of government school **Mt Eliza Primary School**, Merilyn Haynes, selected three teachers, none of them members of the School’s leadership team, to join her in the Southern Cross training. ‘The four of us had different views about what to do but we all wanted a solution. I said, “Everything is open for discussion.”’

Three staff from **Belgrave Heights Christian School** attended a training session to look at changing the school reports: the Head of Secondary, a primary school teacher and the School’s Reports Coordinator (who wears several hats at Belgrave Heights Christian School, including Years 7 and 8 Coordinator).

The team from **Victory Christian College** comprised of the Principal, the Business and Facilities Manager, the Head of the Secondary School, the IT/Marketing Manager and an Administration Officer. The project was the College’s expansion to VCE. ‘We knew the transition to years 11 and 12 would impact across the school,’ said Principal Anne Marie Rodgers, ‘so I was keen to have a cross-section of staff at the training.’

**Mt Hira College** Principal Patricia Gay and four colleagues attended Southern Cross training to examine the issue of student attendance and punctuality. The group included two parents who are on staff (a primary school teacher and the Administration Manager), a secondary school teacher, and Mt Hira College’s Learning and Teaching Coordinator.

Six **Westbourne Grammar School** staff attended Southern Cross training, some with small teaching loads, some with larger teaching loads: the school’s Human Resources Director, a Human Resources and Payroll Officer, the junior school Campus Head, the Deputy Head of the junior school, the Director of Science and the Director of Humanities. The project was about creating a new system of staff performance review. ‘It’s important to have “captains”, to distribute the leadership with such a whole-school project,’ said Principal Meg Hansen.

**ELTHAM College** attended Southern Cross training with a team of six: the Principal, the directors of Early-Junior years, of Middle Years and Wellbeing, of Senior Years, and of Admissions, as well as the College’s Communications Specialist. Its project was to arrest declining numbers within an ageing demographic.

**Holy Trinity Lutheran School** in Horsham took a team of five to its training: the Principal, the Business Manager, the Administration Manager, the IT Manager and a classroom teacher. Its project was to prepare for expanding to a middle school. Horsham, being several hours’ drive from Melbourne, the team chose to stay in the city and divide their four days of training into two two-day blocks a week apart.

The executive leadership team of **Bayside Christian College** attended the Southern Cross training program. Its project was to align the school’s mission statement, values and vision. The team comprised of the Principal, the Head of Academic Administration, the Head of Teaching and Learning (also the Head of English) and the College’s Business Manager. The Deputy Principal attended for one day of the training.
Four Days out of the School

The Southern Cross program consists of four days of training. Here are comments from Principals on the value of the whole team dedicating four days to the program’s training:

As well as valuing the nuts and bolts of the training, the team from Mt Eliza Primary School really appreciated ‘the gift of time’ afforded by the off-site training. There were not the distractions of day-to-day school life and there was the added bonus of the four colleagues getting to know each other a little more during the daily drive together from Mt Eliza to the city – an hour each way.

‘The training gave us the time to look at the issues, away from day-to-day school life, and the chance to focus in on problem-solving processes,’ said ELTHAM College Principal, Dr David Warner. ‘We knew we had a problem and the Southern Cross facilitator kept us on target in refining our major solutions.’

The team from Mt Hira College spread the four days of training over two weeks – two days at a time. ‘Initially, you can be overloaded with ideas,’ said Principal Patricia Gay. ‘We needed the time to go away and think about things. We had come in pre-empting what we wanted and realised we had a lot more work to do.’

‘We had an idea of what we wanted to do,’ said Steve Reiher, the Reports Coordinator at Belgrave Heights Christian School. ‘The training gave us four days without distractions to hone in on the issues facing us.’
Shifting Gears

Schools sometimes need to be prepared to change the direction of their Southern Cross project.

Holy Trinity Lutheran School’s initial intention in attending Southern Cross training was to evaluate the school’s administration and office systems in the light of the school expanding from a primary school to a Prep to Year 9 school. ‘Our facilitator convinced us, quite quickly, that such a project was too broad for the four days of training,’ said Principal Jeff Gork. ‘Instead, we refocused our thoughts and concentrated on a marketing plan for the transition to junior secondary.’

The impetus for the training by Flinders Christian Community College was to develop strategies to embed what the college calls Principals’ Priorities into the learning and corporate culture of the multi-campus school. However, the team of five principals could see, very early in the training, that there was a need to create a collaborative model for its multi-principal set-up. ‘We were side-tracked for about two days, but in a very good way,’ said Principal Jill Healey.

The Adass Israel School team thought its project, improving the cleanliness and order of the school, would be a simple task. However, the team had to determine how they were going to measure the project and determine a baseline. Using this data, they realised the importance of challenging their assumptions and basing decisions on data and results. The collection of data was paramount to the success of the project.

Plenty Valley International Montessori School intended to audit the school’s teaching and learning programs as a way of addressing the issue of retaining students. The brief, though, was too broad. On the first morning of its training, the team realised it needed to focus the scope of its project. ‘We had a wide spread of ideas,’ said Principal Dr Maree Matthews, ‘and after lengthy discussion, honed them down to the issues of enrolment and retention.’
Achievements through the Training

**Holy Trinity Lutheran School** quickly applied the Southern Cross training to its new marketing strategy and then to its enrolment system. It believes it is now better placed to evaluate other office systems as it prepares to expand to a middle school.

‘The Southern Cross training brought home the urgency of our situation and influenced us to move quickly,’ said the Principal of **ELTHAM College**, Dr David Warner.

‘Although we at first diverged from using some of the Southern Cross tools, we achieved really good ends,’ said **Flinders Christian Community College** Principal Jill Healey. ‘We now have templates and models that will be part of the culture of Flinders for years to come.’

During the Southern Cross training, the team from **Albury Wodonga Community College** identified further projects that would benefit from the Southern Cross process framework: review of the Individual Pathways Plan, student case management approach and improvements to the school environment.

**The Geelong Baptist College** team thought the training was extremely valuable for creating a new enrolment process and walked away excited about all the tools that they now had to tackle this issue, and also many others within the school system. The team felt empowered to make changes – one step at a time!

The Principal of **Lighthouse Christian College**, Avril Howard, said that the ‘training was a valuable experience, equipping us with principles and skills that we can apply to other projects for successful outcomes and effective utilisation of funding and resources.’

**Mt Hira College** believes it will be able to transfer its lessons from the Southern Cross training to other aspects of the school. ‘Like any school, there are bound to be issues in the future,’ said Principal Patricia Gay. ‘We’ll be able to remember what we learnt from the training and apply it accordingly.’

‘The processes learnt at the training are now part of the fabric of the school,’ said Dr Maree Matthews, Principal of **Plenty Valley International Montessori School**. ‘The whole framework has been a paradigm shift for us. We now have the ingredients to achieve more at the school.’
Westbourne Grammar School noted that the Southern Cross training had expedited the switch from the old staff performance review to the new. ‘The change – and it is very significant change – has happened more quickly via the Southern Cross training,’ said Principal Meg Hansen.

What would you say to Schools Considering Southern Cross Training?

‘Southern Cross is a terrific process,’ said the Principal of Mt Eliza Primary School, Merilyn Haynes, who has been a principal for eight years, the past four at Mt Eliza Primary School. ‘The training shows you there’s always a different way to do things.’

The Principal of Bayside Christian College, Lorraine Hook, said schools considering the Southern Cross training should ‘make sure the project is a high priority, and then make the most of the training. It’s a well worthwhile program. The processes you learn can be used for any type of change management.’

The Principal of ELTHAM College, Dr David Warner, said of schools considering Southern Cross training: ‘Go into it with an open mind and it will help you to better define your issues.’

‘I think the training is amazing,’ said Ilim College of Australia Inc Principal Aynur Simsirel. ‘It’s a real eye-opener in so many ways. You become a lot more systematic in managing. It allows you to see things a lot more clearly.’

Patricia Gay, the Principal of Mt Hira College, encouraged schools considering the Southern Cross training ‘to have a specific issue, to not go in thinking you already know the answers, and to use the steps and the tools to follow things through.’

‘You may not agree on everything in the training but there’s a lot of value,’ said the Principal of Holy Trinity Lutheran School, Jeff Gork. ‘They key is to go with an open mind. And, like any training, it very much depends on the presenter, and I have nothing but praise for the facilitator, who was very experienced and very confident.’