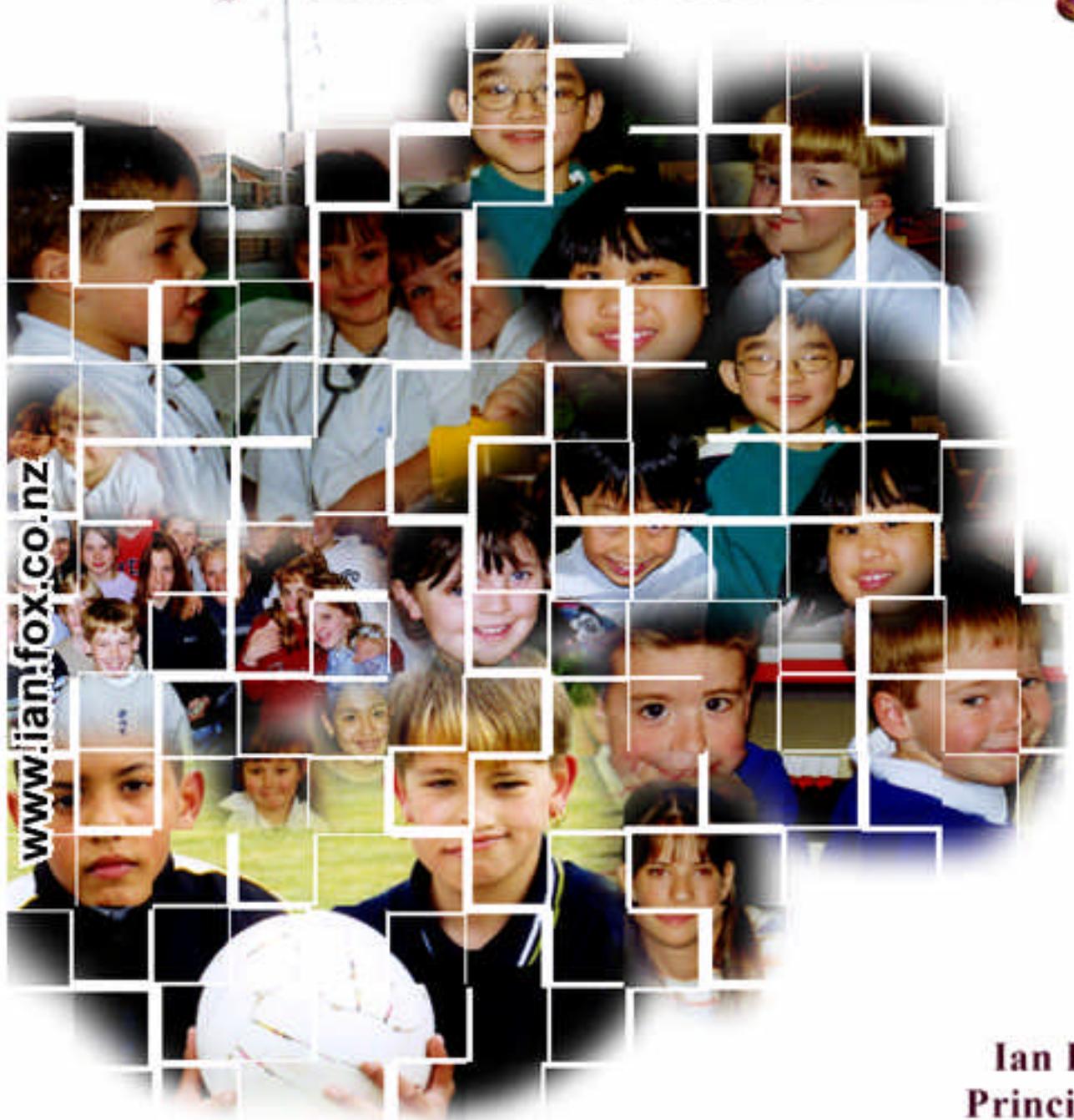


Developing a Vision for Learning



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3 Month Travelling Fellowship 1999

“Developing a Vision for Learning in the 21st Century.”

A report to the ASB Bank Trust and the Auckland Primary Principals’ Association following a three months travelling fellowship during the months of March to May 1999.

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Firstly I wish to acknowledge the ASB Bank Trust without whose financial support Auckland principals, such as myself, would not have the opportunity to travel and explore the wider fields of education beyond our boundaries. The opportunity to visit schools overseas is highly valued. It allows us not only to grow professionally from knowledge gained, but also to quietly measure our own performance against the best seen elsewhere. This can only benefit our schools both now and in the future.

I also wish to thank the Auckland Primary Principals’ Association for my selection. It is humbling to be granted such an award from one’s peers. I sincerely hope the following report and the ongoing discussions and sharing of information justify my selection.

Thanks to Trust Secretary, Barry Cashmore, for his genuine interest and on-going belief in the worth of this study grant along with his clear, easy communication ensuring planning proceeded with no impediments.

I would like to acknowledge assistance from the Ministry of Education enabling leave to be taken without the school being financially disadvantaged.

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Introduction

In 1970 Alvin Toffler (1970) warned that as we approached the new millennium society as we knew it then would undergo significant change and that the pace of this change would increase at a faster and faster rate. Changes impacting on education would not be as visible as those having an effect on other sectors of society but schools would need to look at the curriculum offered and adjust programmes accordingly. Knowledge and skills generally being taught in schools would not necessarily be those adults would need in their future lives.

In recent years much has been done to develop a new curriculum for our schools in order to prepare students for this future. The future however is still far from certain. The United States Bureau of Labour estimates that 70% of all jobs now require some minimal understanding of how to operate a computer. By the year 2010 all jobs will require significant computer skills and over 80% of these jobs have not even been created yet (Jackson, 1999).

In spite of the significance of this information many classrooms continue to function in a very traditional way with teaching styles similar to those used early in this current century. In these rooms students are seen as empty vessels coming to school ready to be topped up with knowledge each day. This knowledge is poured in with the expectation it will be regurgitated at some later date.

“The problem with education isn’t that schools aren’t what they used to be, the problem is that schools are what they used to be. Schools have not gotten worse, they have simply not changed for the better.” (Gerstner, et al 1994).

We cannot know for sure what knowledge our students will need to best prepare them for the new millennium. What we do know however is that they will need to become life-long learners, able to adapt to the future changes which will inevitably have an impact on their lives. Teaching students *how* to learn is now more important than teaching them *what* to

learn. Students should be developing thinking processes critical for the information age which enable them to know *how to access* the knowledge required, and more importantly, *how to evaluate* the veracity of the source and the knowledge itself. In order for schools to be effective in the future a clear vision for student learning is required.

The “Mortimore Report” (1995), commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education in England, (OFSTED), reviewed school effectiveness research summarising current knowledge as to the key determinants of school effectiveness in both primary and secondary schools.

This report listed eleven key determinants for school effectiveness.

- 1 Professional leadership
- 2 Shared vision and goals
- 3 A learning environment
- 4 Concentration on teaching and learning
- 5 Purposeful teaching
- 6 High expectations
- 7 Positive reinforcement
- 8 Monitoring progress
- 9 Pupil rights and responsibilities
- 10 Home-school partnership
- 11 A learning organisation



One of the most significant findings in the research was the importance of the school principal’s leadership in facilitating positive change. It was determined that leadership was not simply about the quality of an individual leader, but was more about the role the leader played in the school. Issues such as the leader’s management style, relationship to the vision values and goals of the school, and the approach the leader took to change were more significant.

Three characteristics for successful leadership were identified.

1 Effective schools leaders were firm and purposeful:

Others working within the school can play a central role in bringing about change but most research has shown the headteacher or principal to be the key agent in bringing about change. Outstanding leaders tend to be proactive. They are able to bring together a high degree of consensus and unity amongst senior staff members. They are able to initiate and maintain the school improvement process. Most importantly effective leaders ensure effective change comes from within the school.

2 Effective school leaders adopt a participative approach:

Effective leaders ensure leadership responsibilities are shared and all are involved in decision making. A collaborative culture exists. Effective leaders involve others in the development of a common vision with everyone encouraged to work towards its successful implementation.

3 Effective leaders become the leading professional:

Effective leaders become the leading professional within the school. They are aware of what is happening in classrooms. They are visible and are seen in classrooms often. They engage in frequent conversations with staff on professional issues and project a high profile through their actions.

A second key finding in Mortimore’s report was that schools are more effective where staff build consensus on the aims and values of the school, with a shared vision and a clear understanding of the goals all are working to achieve.

Three aspects were found.

1 Unity of purpose:

Effective schools were found to have a shared vision that was able to inspire those working there and help develop a common purpose. Where this unity of

purpose existed higher morale was evident amongst staff, along with more effective teaching.

2 Consistency of practice:

Effective schools showed teachers in general worked in a common and agreed way with respect to matters such as assessment, policy implementation and curriculum delivery. Mortimore found that in schools where teachers adopted a consistent approach to the use of school curriculum guidelines there was a positive impact on the progress of pupils. The importance of the teacher as an appropriate role model was also emphasised.

3 Collegiality and collaboration:

Effective schools seem to have a high degree of involvement from all who work there. There is a sense of ownership which comes from the sharing of ideas, support from one to another and a general feeling that all can learn from each other. Cooperation rather than competition is the goal. Effective schools develop a strong sense of community among staff and students.

For this ASB/APPa Travelling Fellowship I sought to explore the relationship between *vision* and *leadership*. Research quoted supports the view that when a clear and focused vision for student learning has been collaboratively developed, where this is well communicated and understood, and where structures and strategies are in place that encourage teachers and students to work towards achieving the vision, positive change can be accomplished. In general the link between *vision* and *leadership* is widely known.

It is my belief that something else is required however before the *vision* can be translated into *action*. It is my contention a *catalyst* is needed to initiate and focus change, along with skilled *leadership* to support those working within the school through the challenges change will inevitably bring.

By *catalyst* I mean a common focus that assists teachers implement change. The *catalyst* provides a structure enabling teachers to work in a common way towards the implementation of the agreed to goals. It is the means by which the *vision* is translated into *action*.

To illustrate this concept I refer to the model used at Bucklands Beach Intermediate School. Here the *catalyst* is best exemplified through the school’s notion of *Learning to Learn*. Much has been done within this school in an effort to have students take increasing responsibility for their own learning. It is recognised that if students are to be successful in the future they must be given the skills to learn how to learn. What is wanted is for them to understand that learning is something they do, it is not something that is done to them. Strategies have been put in place which increasingly lead students towards becoming self-directed, independent learners. A student portfolio is the vehicle used to guide these changes.

The way in which this concept is translated into reality is illustrated through the *Learning to Learn Portfolio Model*. (Fig 1). Each component of the model represents a significant contribution to the school’s vision that has evolved collaboratively over approximately 10 years of commitment and experimentation by teachers, students and parents. The model now helps guide teachers working within the school. It signals the school’s intent and future direction.



(Fig 1) **Learning to Learn Portfolio Model**

The portfolio provides structures that scaffold students towards increased responsibility for their own learning while also providing structures to assist teachers make the paradigm shift from that of director to facilitator of learning. These structures support teachers in making the paradigm shift at a pace that minimises concerns over losing control. They provide a focus to generate discussion, debate and ultimately unity as the overall school goals are implemented.

At Bucklands Beach Intermediate School the portfolio has become the *catalyst* for change giving structure and guidance for both staff and students.

- Do other schools use such a *catalyst* for managing change?
- Would it be possible to identify such a *catalyst* and determine how it supports the achievement of the school’s vision?
- What is the *leader’s* role in this process?

These are questions I sought to answer during my travels. I hoped to find the *catalyst* used to implement change and identify the means by which *successful* schools managed to change the culture within the school and work toward achieving the vision desired.

The *successful* schools visited were identified in quite an arbitrary manner. This was through word of mouth from colleagues who had visited in an area previously or through readings from journals and educational articles. In the UK *successful* schools were identified primarily from a listing supplied by the Office for Standards in Education, OFSTED.

Once *successful* schools had been nominated direct contact was made to arrange for a visit and follow up discussion.

I have attempted to record as faithfully as possible information conveyed both from discussions held and from observations. Through the use of a small tape recorder I have been able to record detailed quotes from key personnel in most schools. This was seen as important in my effort to convey faithfully the school’s intent.

During my travels close to 30 schools were visited. It was decided to select ten of these to report as case studies in the hope that information presented would challenge thinking and perhaps offer some basis for further discussion. It was also hoped those reading this report would find structures and ideas which could be adapted and applied to the New Zealand setting.

The case study approach was deliberately chosen to provide readers with a range of school improvement measures from a variety of schools. It is not expected readers will agree with all measures outlined but perhaps they will find an approach which stimulates a desire to seek further information or which sparks an idea for discussion within their own schools.

It should be noted that in selecting these ten schools there is no intention to convey an impression these were the best schools seen with others not worthy of mention. Nor does it mean they were the best schools in areas visited. It is highly possible outstanding schools existed close by about which I had no knowledge.



In the ten case studies reported all schools demonstrate that they have a clear idea as to the goals they wish to achieve and a unified understanding as to how their vision is to be implemented. There is evidence of a *catalyst* being used to drive the *vision*, helping move teachers forward towards the goals

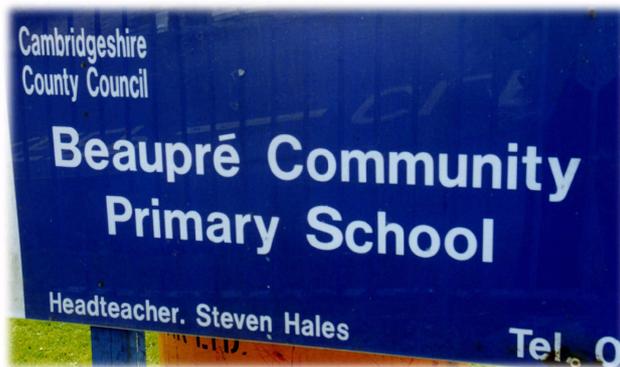
sought. All clearly show that a vision for student learning has been developed and is being implemented as each school strives to best prepare its students for their lives in the 21st century.

“Developing a Vision for Learning in the 21st Century.”

1 **Beaupré Community School**

“It takes a whole village to raise a child”

Although set in the county of Norfolk, England, Beaupré Community Primary School is one of the Cambridgeshire County Council’s schools. It caters for children aged 4 – 11 years. The school is relatively small with a roll of 170 pupils. Beaupré is rather isolated, situated as it is in a rural part of the East Anglia Fens. Communications can be limited. Unemployment is a significant problem with few opportunities for gaining long term employment. Much of the work available is of a short-term seasonal nature.



The Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority recognised the special needs of the area and designated Beaupré a “Community Primary School” in 1972. Since then it has become the main meeting place within the village and a focal point for

much of what happens locally.

Principal Steven Hales, believes the school plays a significant role within the community, and can take some credit for bringing the small rural community together.

“Being in a rural community these children do not always get the same opportunities as those who live in the towns and cities. We believe we are able to fill that gap.”

A ‘325 and a half’ club has been established providing after school child care for working parents or for those who have to go out of the village to

shop. An “under-five” group meets regularly, with parents and the children due to begin school in the next year coming together to have a cup of coffee and support each other while their children play together. Informal discussions on child development and childcare frequently take place.

A youth club for 8-13 year olds meets after school once a week. This club is open to all youth within the area and is not restricted to current school students. Many who attend are past students of the school. The club now has over 100 members.

School is open on Saturday mornings with a wide range of programmes on offer. Some of these are designed to prepare children for the national tests and others are in the art and cultural areas. The school is the venue for several community-based groups including karate, cubs and scouts and a gardening club.

As most of the older children have to bus out of the area for their high school education they are encouraged to use the school library, computers, and other facilities when they return to the village after school and at the weekends. This enables them to access resources needed in their local area without having to go further afield. Adults are also encouraged to use the school’s resources. Those without computers at home can come to school to learn how to use the computer or to gain experience on the use of the Internet.

Beaupré school has adopted the philosophy “*It takes a whole village to raise a child*” as a framework for developing its network of community partnerships to support and enhance student learning. There is a commitment to “*learning together for life*” and the whole notion of community development through partnerships. A framework has been established providing strategies that enable students to meet the challenges of life now and in the 21st century. This partnership model is designed to improve children’s skills in communication, teamwork and problem solving while increasing their self confidence, their self esteem, their cultural understanding and their love of learning.

The model outlines how partnerships have been developed as a series of layers which spread out from the child and its family to the local community, the district, the country, the continent and the rest of the world. It is recognised that a strong network of people and places provides a rich source of skills, talents and resources all able to be utilized to support learning.



Students are encouraged to use the support network to help them develop their own knowledge and understandings when carrying out school studies. A critical task is for school leaders to ensure teacher programme planning indicates how the community, either locally or further afield, is to be used as a resource, and that connections are made with the community wherever possible.

Steven Hales gave a number of specific examples to illustrate how this philosophy works in practice.

1 The school as a village:

Children are encouraged to participate in the day to day running of the school wherever possible. They assist with a range of tasks and responsibilities such as answering the telephone at break times, clearing e-mails daily, assisting with parent and toddler groups, guiding visitors around the school and organising the school council. Opportunities provided assist students develop a sense of pride and ownership within their school giving a feeling that the school is theirs and it exists to meet their needs. Their involvement also provides many opportunities for the development of skills in citizenship.

2 The village as a village:

Local businesses provide an important link within the community. Preschool groups visit the post office, the fish and chip shop and the local supermarket. As children become older they visit some of the more historic buildings within the area leading to a growing understanding of their heritage. A study of the local area is made using key people within the community to assist. There are many community members with a wealth of knowledge who are only too happy to support the school and are willing to allow children to conduct interviews as part of their school studies.

These links within the local area enable parents and friends of the school to offer support in a practical way. They can share their expertise with students knowing they are supporting the education of children within their village. Those who may have little direct contact with the school also gain a much greater understanding of what is happening at their local school.

Links have been established with a local home for the elderly. Students visit on a regular basis reading to residents and sharing with them work from their school. Regular performances in music and dance are also part of the programme.

The school has developed a network of volunteers, parents and friends of the school who support classroom activities. A database has been established for when a class requires assistance with a particular task, or a student or teacher has a need for someone with specialised knowledge. The database can be checked and community members contacted to see if it is possible for assistance to be given.

“The community can provide a rich range of resources if we look. So often schools rely on books as the only source of information. There is a wealth of knowledge available in every community. If one person does not know the answer often they will say, ‘I don’t know the answer myself but I do know someone who does know.’”



3 The United Kingdom as a village:

Beaupré school has developed strong links with the Greater Peterborough Training and Enterprise Council which supports the school with resources, training and networking. Where appropriate students are taken outside their immediate community to participate in activities further afield. This is often most appropriate in the Arts.

4 Europe as a village:

The school has an active European education partnership with a school in the Netherlands and a school in Denmark. Access to EEC funding has

enabled Beaupré to collaborate with others to produce a photographic exhibition reflecting upon similarities and differences in the ways the three communities celebrate various festivals. A creative arts project based on the theme ‘circus’ also provided an opportunity for the school to link together through the use of electronic communications. Links are now being developed with Finland, the Czech Republic and Greece.

5 The world as a village:

Beaupré has developed a family of link schools across the world. Apart from those mentioned above links have been made with The Netherlands, South Africa, Australia, the USA and Canada. A recent common technology project enabled children to share their ideas and perspectives with others. They were able to design their ‘classroom in the year 2020’ and send this by fax and email around the globe. As these concepts travelled from one school to another children were able to increase their global perspectives. A greater understanding of similarities and differences between the countries has resulted from this project. An example of this is the understanding gained of differing climatic conditions as children in Finland designed classrooms to cope with the weather they might expect throughout the year compared to those designed in South Africa catering for climatic conditions in their country.

Beaupré has sought to establish strong partnership links between the school and the home in order to meet the needs of individual children. Its vision goes beyond that of the school being used simply as a facility for community group use, to one where there is real involvement and ownership of the school site. It has become the focal point of the small rural community in an area that has been classified as having one of the highest socio-economic needs in Cambridgeshire.

The vision has also extended to a community partnership model placing the child at the centre of a whole network of support structures, each able to provide assistance as students search for knowledge and understandings. The principal has recognised students could become very

inward looking and insular due to their relatively isolated geographic location. To avoid this occurring he has ensured they see themselves as part of a much broader global village. Partnerships and links established both locally and further afield, with contact being maintained through telephone, fax and email, help maintain this concept.

Evidence provided would indicate the model adopted is making a significant difference both for students attending the school and for the youth within the broader community. National testing results show improved learning outcomes in both literacy and numeracy. These results are expected to continue to improve as students further develop their contacts using a range of communication skills. Beaupré’s efforts have been recognised in the form of a European Curriculum Award and a Schools’ Curriculum Award.

The philosophy adopted, *“It takes a whole village to raise a child,”* has been firmly established. The school is the focal point in the small rural community with adults and children alike using the facilities and feeling very comfortable about being able to come and go at any time.

Principal Steven Hales sums the school’s vision up when he says:

“Beaupré is the centre of our small rural community. It is open all hours with something for everyone.”

“Developing a Vision for Learning in the 21st Century.”

2

Bredbyskolan

“Teachers or Pedagogues?”

Bredbyskolan, (Bredby School), is a Grade 1-9 school with around 330 students located in a high-density housing area some 15 minutes by underground train from the centre of Stockholm, Sweden. The school is a product of the “Project Million” housing development undertaken in Sweden during the sixties to provide accommodation for one million people.

A high percentage of immigrant children attend Bredbyskolan, many of whom are recent arrivals from war torn countries. Unemployment within the district is higher than in other parts of Stockholm. Owing to the diversity of backgrounds large numbers of students have a language other than Swedish as their first language. Many adult residents have had few educational opportunities and their grasp of the Swedish language is limited. The school has determined it must accept the responsibility of providing for the younger generation in the community, enabling them to take their place as valued members of society in the future.

To enable this to be achieved the school has put in place programmes that seek to encourage students to feel secure in their new environment and to have a degree of optimism for the future. It is hoped they will develop in self-confidence, accept responsibility, and acquire the ability to think independently, feeling safe to express their own point of view within the class or school environment.

Government funded schemes have been used to work towards improving conditions within the community. In this school additional resources have been provided allowing staff to pupil ratios to be kept low. Teachers work in teams of three to five with each team being responsible collectively for around 40-60 students. The school’s staffing, consisting of teachers, recreation staff, principal, assistant principal, school nurse, psychologist,

canteen staff, porter and cleaners totals close to seventy. Ratios at Bredbyskolan are certainly lower than in many other regions within Sweden. They are certainly considerably lower than could be hoped for in New Zealand!

During a meeting with the assistant principal, an experienced class teacher, and two senior students, the school’s vision for the future was discussed along with an outline of changes that had been undertaken in recent years. The two students had opportunities to state their feelings with respect to the changes implemented and contributed significantly to discussions held.



The area, which generated most discussion, centred on the terminology used to describe those working within the school in the traditional teaching role. Bredbyskolan has now adopted the word ‘*pedagogue*’ in place of the word ‘*teacher*.’ The staff believes ‘*pedagogue*’ better reflects the role of the teacher in the classroom at this school. It is believed the term ‘*teacher*’ has the connotations of an adult standing in front of a group of students, presenting material which will be recorded, learnt, and at some later stage, tested. This is certainly still the model evident in many schools. Bredbyskolan, in developing its vision for the future, wanted to send a very clear message to staff, students, and the community, that significant changes in learning approaches were being implemented.

As one senior student said:

“In the 7th grade I used to have 40 minutes maths, 40 minutes English, 40 minutes Swedish and so on. In the 8th grade I had different teachers. They wanted to try something new. We began working in themes with an open timetable. Now we work in small groups most of the time and have three or four teachers who work with us. We do not have lessons for 40 minutes. We have the different subjects all together. We are not in the classroom all the time. Often we are out in the

community doing research or interviews. We may be at the library at school or in the city, or on the Internet. Our subjects are integrated as much as possible into a theme. This includes subjects like maths. We have to look at planning our work around the theme and look at how we can integrate each of the different subject areas. This does not work all the time but mostly it does.

Sometimes the teachers will take some of us and give a special lesson if it is needed. Other times they will just be there to help us with problems we may be having.”

It is this major difference which opened the ‘*teacher-pedagogue*’ debate. The principal and senior teachers adopted the ‘*pedagogue*’ label believing it better illustrates the teacher’s role in the learning process. ‘*Pedagogues*’ are there to assist students with their learning. They are there to provide an environment where learning will take place. Their responsibility is to monitor what happens to students in relation to the curriculum, and to ensure a balanced coverage over the school year. This coverage may not necessarily be best met through working to a 40-minute timetable in a classroom with one teacher.

Changes introduced initially came about when a group of Grade 8 teachers decided there was a need to provide a forum that would create some discussion on the teacher’s role within the school. They had found staff members seldom, if ever, discussed educational issues in the staffroom. Most discussions that did take place centred on disciplinary matters. Issues relating to student learning rarely featured.

The Grade 8 teachers decided it would be healthy to create an environment which challenged current thinking and stimulated staff members into debating and questioning their current teaching methods. They wanted to open the “*teaching Vs learning*” debate. They believed if a common philosophy could be established, one which cut across all grade levels, and all curriculum areas, issues would develop which would stimulate discussion as all felt their impact.

In working towards achieving this vision team teaching was introduced at the Grade 8 level. Several teachers took on collective responsibility for a group of students rather than for solely one class and one or two subject areas, as had previously been the case. Simultaneously the timetable was virtually thrown away with a thematic approach and an integrated day introduced. Students began to plan their own day, in line with the current theme, seeking to integrate different aspects of the curriculum wherever possible.

At the beginning of a new theme teachers would work with students discussing how various curricula areas could be integrated. They would look to see if it could be possible to develop maths within the theme, or music, or any of the other subject areas. They helped students as they set out their own plans to meet the requirements set out in curricula documents. They helped develop the skills required and provided support and guidance to assist students into this new approach to their learning. Learning, now became the issue. The debate as to whether it should be ‘*teacher*’ or ‘*pedagogue*’ had begun.

Students began moving out into the community. The local library became a popular resource. Local business people were interviewed in person and by ‘phone. Visitors were invited into the school to share their knowledge and experiences. The Internet became a great source of information. Processes associated with learning had taken over from the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake.

Students were encouraged to work to a time frame, planning their studies, seeking help from ‘*pedagogues*’ as required, working to deadlines to have a completed assignment ready by the due date for presentation to other students within their team.

Once this concept was introduced and well established at one grade level the move was on to extend the ideas throughout the school. Students had become excited with this new way of learning and had an expectation it

would continue the following year. As they moved through the grades pressure was placed on the next group of teachers to follow a similar approach. Teachers were given support and encouragement to work towards the changes sought.

As this new way of working became more established across the school a common perspective grew. Teachers began sharing experiences. Educational issues became a frequent topic of conversation in the staffroom. Of course not all teachers were happy with the changes being introduced and so much debate was initiated. The whole issues of how students could best learn, and also what it was which they most needed to learn, became frequent topics for discussion.

Now, with a completely integrated timetable, students work on a particular theme for a defined period of time. Some timetabled slots are retained for particular subject areas such as music and physical education. Sometimes it is deemed necessary to take a whole class or group lesson in a particular area to cover issues of need and also to ensure full curriculum coverage. The goal however is to integrate as many curricula areas as possible.

Students from one grade level are now often given opportunities to work at a different grade level enabling their knowledge of the school’s learning process to be shared. Students from grade 5 may work with students from grade 8. They become trainees as to the new way of working. Students from grade 2 may be invited as visitors to see what is happening at grade 4 so they also become familiar with the process prior to entering that grade level.

Students do not always decide their own working partners. ‘*Pedagogues*’ often determine working groups. This is based on the belief that where students are required to choose their own groupings they would generally tend to select close friends often from the same ethnic and language backgrounds. “*Pedagogue*” selected groups are established to address a gender balance and to provide a cultural mix wherever possible. In this way each culture is seen to be important. Students are able to carry out research

in their first language prior to coming together to share material found. It is considered this allows for a much richer focus with the uniqueness of each culture and language being emphasised. The process enables students to work in their first language, which continues its development, while at the same time strengthening the only common language of communication for the group, Swedish. Both languages are therefore developed simultaneously through this mixed grouping policy.

Bredbyskolan has also attempted to mix students and adults with different areas of skill and expertise. ‘*Pedagogues*’ work across grade levels and are responsible for all students in their team. They work towards a common way of looking at learning across the school with the focus on how students develop as learners rather than on a specific body of knowledge. ‘*Pedagogues*’ can provide assistance in nineteen different languages.

‘*Pedagogues*’ work with students instead of spending time telling them what to do. Students are responsible for putting their own programme together within the broad guidelines given. Much of the programme responsibility is given to students within a supportive and encouraging environment ensuring over the year curriculum requirements are met.

At the end of each theme student work is assessed in order to see what knowledge and skills have been gained and how this relates to curriculum requirements. ‘*Pedagogues*’ look for a balance in curriculum objectives. Records are maintained to assist with identifying areas requiring further attention.

One of the students stated she found this approach difficult at first.

“When I was in the 7th grade the teacher would stand up in front of the whiteboard telling us everything. Then we went into the 8th grade and they were telling us to go out and search for the information. We would be confused and wonder if we really had to do that. We wondered why the teachers couldn’t just tell us like they used to do before.”

The deputy principal explained that prior to the changes taking place there was little if any discussion relating to education occurring within the school. Teachers went about their daily tasks in a very traditional manner, working within their own classrooms, focusing on their own curriculum areas. Knowledge was provided for students to learn as outlined in the curriculum. There appeared to be little reason to discuss issues with others on the staff. Teachers were responsible for their own programme. Little coordination or cooperation was evident across the school. With the thematic approach things have changed dramatically.

The introduction of this new approach around five years ago was initially slow to be implemented across the school. Teachers at some grade levels were reluctant to make changes desired. Strategies such as the involvement of students across different grade levels were instigated in an effort to assist the changes occur. These helped to some extent.

As new members of staff were appointed the principal ensured applicants and appointees were all aware of the expectations and style of working required. This sent very clear signals to current staff as to where the school's future direction lay. No longer was the approach seen as optional. It was now a part of the school's culture and its future vision. Some teachers who felt they could not work in this new environment moved on to other schools. New teachers prepared to take on the challenges were appointed.

When Bredbyskolan began working this way it was a grade 1-6 school. Since that time Grades 7-9 have been added following pressure from students and parents. Although many within the community do not entirely understand the new way of working they do know their children are much happier at school and are more successful with their learning. Students in general are keen to come to school. Truancy numbers are down and attendance rates are up. Some who leave the school to go off to one of the more traditional Grade 7-9 schools within the area have returned having found it difficult to work in an environment which stifled their creativity and failed to allow them to take any control for their own learning.

Some students who have returned to visit their ‘*pedagogues*’ when at the senior high school level have stated that in terms of some areas of knowledge they are lacking compared to students from other grade 7-9 schools. They have found there are some parts of the curriculum, which have not been fully covered. What they do know however is that they can go to the local library, they can use the telephone and conduct an interview, they can use their computer skills and they have the ability to find the knowledge required. They know they are far more independent in their learning habits feeling confident to take a high degree of control over the subject matter being presented.

Unfortunately there are other factors which create difficulties for students when moving from a school which encourages students to take this degree of control for learning and then moving to one with a much more conventional knowledge based structure.

Perhaps this is best illustrated by the deputy principal’s comments referring to a discussion he had with a group of students who returned to visit him several weeks after beginning their new senior high school.

“Some of the most successful students came back after only a few weeks away and they cried and were really depressed because they had been given a history test to sit which was specifically designed to see what they had learned the previous year. Many of them had not done very well on the test.

In the students’ last year at Bredbyskolan their final theme was one which had as its focus “Two hundred and fifty years of change.” This was a theme about ideologies and revolutions around the world. During this theme one student had studied the French Revolution and had read Voltaire and Rousseau. She had found these philosophers believed this and that. She was able to clearly articulate the differences in each point of view. Another student had decided to study Karl Marx. She knew what Karl Marx had believed. These two students had engaged in an in-depth discussion comparing the beliefs of one philosopher with another looking at the similarities and differences of their respective points of view. Other students were able to present several more viewpoints with respect to philosophers they had studied.

They were able to relate different theories to many issues that were effecting their country today.

As ‘pedagogues’ we just stood there and suddenly realised these students knew far more than we did. They had a detailed understanding of issues being addressed and were able to apply these to a new context.

The sad thing was when they were asked to sit the history test at their new school the first question asked was ‘When did the French Revolution begin?’ Then the next question was ‘Who was the Swedish King when this happened?’ It was simply a collection of facts that were being asked.

The students could see the test had been put together on a typewriter which indicated how old it was. Several had almost every question incorrect. They could discuss significant issues related to the period but some of the detailed facts they did not remember. They also wanted to debate some of the questions. One was curious to know how you defined when the French revolution began. Was it when the French King decided this or was it when another particular event occurred?

One student said now she knew what it was teachers wanted it would be easy to get good grades. She would just learn the facts the teacher wanted her to learn and make sure she gave these back in the tests. She knew in future it would be easy to get good grades. She realised however that she knew so much more but no one was interested in finding out what that was. The teacher at her new school did not seem to be interested in hearing this. He just wanted to know the answer to the questions he was asking.”

The path chosen by Bredbyskolan has not always been easy, as others have not necessarily seen learning in the same light. It was reported that the Gymnasium (High School) does not like what is happening. Bredbyskolan students have been taught to ask lots of questions and to challenge and debate what they have been told. Teachers at the Gymnasium sometimes find this difficult.

Bredbyskolan is also challenging some of the long held notions with respect to national testing. The curriculum says Swedish as a mother tongue and Swedish as a 2nd language are two different subjects yet there is national testing for Swedish but not for Swedish as a 2nd language. All students are

expected to sit the same test. As most students at Bredbyskolan have Swedish as a 2nd language most are being tested on a curriculum they have not been taught. The school is to force these issues by not having their 2nd language students sit the national test. This will create an interesting dilemma for politicians and educational authorities in the future.

Bredbyskolan has now set as a target the establishment of their own Senior High School. They are coming under increasing pressure from parents to do so to enable their students to continue learning in the matter to which they have become accustomed. No longer would they then have to leave their school to move into a system that students themselves find inappropriate and stifling. They would be able to continue to develop their own learning styles, and plan their own learning programmes, realising learning is something they are able to do for themselves, it is not something which has to be done to them.

With the very clear vision and direction evident at Bredbyskolan this is a goal which is likely to be achieved in the near future.

3 Brookfield Junior School

“To boldly go where no one has gone before.”

This expression from the well-known television programme, “Star Trek,” greets visitors to Brookfield Junior School in Kent, England. It features in a painting covering a wall of Principal Simon Webb’s office.



“Surely this is what schools are all about. We want teachers to lead our children into the future. I think it sums up our vision rather well. We need to be constantly looking at how we can move further ahead. A school cannot stand still.”

(Senior staff members agreed with the sentiments but some were not so sure about the painting on the office wall!)

Brookfield is a large Grant Maintained (bulk-funded) school that is one of three schools set on the same site. An Infant School and a County Primary share the same grounds. Brookfield is seen as a successful school. It has received very favourable reports from OFSTED. SATS (National Standardised Achievement Testing) results are high. Strong support from parents is evident.

Simon Webb has worked at Brookfield for the past 11 years implementing changes considered desirable for the benefit of all students. The school roll has grown considerably, as has the school’s reputation. There are now more students enrolled than the site can comfortably accommodate.

Simon Webb decided it was time to look for new challenges. He contacted

the local education authority to discuss his future and was offered the opportunity to take over a ‘*failing*’ school. This was a school in another community not too far away from where he was working. It had received a very poor report from OFSTED. In fact the inspection report was such that the Principal had been asked to leave. For this reason the name of the school will not be used here. It will be referred to as NC Primary.

NC Primary is a school with a roll heavily in decline. Parents who were in a position to do so moved their children to other schools within the neighbourhood. The school had developed a reputation for being the worst in the area. Violence was a regular part of its culture. Weekends were measured by the number of broken windows at the school on a Monday morning.

Almost 80% of the children attending the school are classified as ‘*travellers.*’ There is frequent movement in and out of the school with many still living in mobile homes and caravans. Many others attending the school are the first generation to live at a permanent fixed address.

“These children are cherished by their parents. Problems often arise however in that they believe their children can do no wrong. This creates difficulties when we have problems at school, or maybe when damage has occurred over the weekend. Parents find it difficult to believe their children could be responsible. It is difficult to get their support.”

The previous Principal had been at the school for a very long time. It was not known exactly how long she had been there, but it was known she had been the school’s deputy principal prior to becoming principal. It was claimed the last new member of staff had been appointed 18 years previously! There had been no appointments since that time! All staff had taught at the school since beginning their teaching careers and had not taught anywhere else. This in itself was a most unusual situation.

The community saw the previous principal as a very caring person who had

the well being of the children at heart. She was popular with parents. She was there for the children and pastorally gave them much support. She knew all the families and had watched a significant number of the children grow up to have children of their own. Teachers saw working in this area more as a vocation. Curriculum issues were not seen as being highly relevant and had received very little focus over the years.

In 1997 OFSTED visited the school to carry out an inspection. Those visiting were not at all impressed with what they found and reported on a number of very serious weaknesses. Academic standards were of a very poor standard. There was little evidence of professional guidance and no evidence of staff development having taken



place. The national curriculum was not being addressed with social issues having consistently taken priority. The Principal was seen as caring of the students but she had not adjusted to the changing times.

Financially the school was in a mess. A number of additional teachers and teaching assistants had been appointed, however as the school roll continued to fall, funding levels had dropped. Staff had been given long term contracts so it was not easy for them to be put off. More and more of the funding had been taken away from the curriculum to pay for the additional teacher and assistant salaries. Few if any new teaching resources had been purchased for a number of years.

OFSTED put together an action plan that was to be implemented. When it returned in 1998 little progress was noted. As a consequence the Principal was removed along with a number of Board of Governor members. An acting head was appointed to implement the action plan and improve standards.

He put structures in place and moved quickly to implement changes

outlined. These he imposed. He held few discussions with the staff nor did he consult them regarding the changes. He undertook a major clean out of old teaching resources with three large jumbo bins of ‘rubbish’ being thrown out.

As a consequence of his actions the staff withdrew all goodwill. They refused to sit in the staffroom with the Principal and would not undertake duties which were not absolutely essential as part of their contracts. Teachers would not go into the playground at break times to help with the supervision of students. Cleaners and lunch supervisors all left in protest.

This Principal was left with a school to run without the assistance of the teaching staff nor many of those essential for a support role. The Local Education Authority deemed it necessary to make yet another change. Simon Webb was asked to take on this challenge. He inherited a very difficult situation.

The visit to the school took place in the second week following Simon Webb’s appointment. It was certainly interesting to observe what was happening both with staff and with students.

The level of violence in the school playground was very high. As students went out to break following their school dinner it appeared their goal was to see how many people they could hurt in the shortest space of time. Junior children were given a separate section of the playground in an effort to avoid them suffering injury from the more senior students.

Children spent their time chasing each other, pushing from behind, kicking, crashing into each other, and generally creating as much mayhem as possible. Apart from one soccer ball no sporting equipment or other playground facilities seemed to be available for student use.

There was not a teacher to be seen. They all remained inside. One unqualified supervisor employed by the school patrolled the playground.

The children showed her very little respect as she battled to stop fights. Some children jumped on her, with others continually running to her seeking protection.

The Principal decided he needed to be in the playground during the lunch breaks as other teaching staff members were still refusing to do so. He spent his time pulling fighting children apart. He had no time for lunch. If he was lucky he would grab a sandwich later in the afternoon after he had finished sorting out the problems arising from the violent confrontations during the lunch period

In discussing the issues with Simon Webb later in the day he knew the current situation could not continue. He was obviously stressed with what he had had to deal with. This was his second week and he knew that alone he could not make the changes required.

He could not act as a policeman each day, attempting to break up violent episodes as they occurred. He needed the support of his staff before any real change could take place. He would need to work with them so that collectively they could agree to put in place procedures that would



change the culture of the school. This would be a real challenge as the elements of goodwill and trust were non-existent within this school.

Simon Webb knew he would have to earn trust and respect. In the short time he had been at the school already there were the beginnings of change evident. He had started by looking for those in key positions with whom he could work. The staff was aware that with the significant drop in the school roll, and with its poor report, there was a very real likelihood of the school being closed. There was a degree of self-interest evident for some staff who knew significant changes would be needed to ensure that the school

remained open.

Simon started by putting effort into having the children develop consistency with routines and procedures. He was setting clear guidelines for the children and enforcing these consistently. Structures were in place also to monitor teacher planning to see that it met the needs of the curriculum. He was looking for sound classroom programmes that would meet the needs of the children so they would be more settled within the classroom.

Classroom visits had begun and written feedback was being provided to teachers. He sought to give as many positive comments as could be found in an effort to encourage change within the classroom. Routines, procedures and consistency were seen as being essential first steps towards making change.

“We need to change the whole culture of the school. It has been imbedded for so long that this will be difficult. I have to rebuild the staff’s trust. Some of them still believe they are right and OFSTED is wrong. A few will not accept that they have to do things differently. It will be necessary to use the special measures available to move some out of teaching.”

The contrast between this school, and the Principal’s own school, Brookfield, was vast. The focus of this report was to have been on Brookfield, an obviously very successful school. Instead after the visit to NC Primary it seemed more appropriate to report on the challenges facing a successful principal seeking to institute change in a school with great need.

Already after one school week some changes could be noted. Simon was spending much time consulting teachers and listening to their concerns. He was visiting rooms and offering support where possible. He was leading by example and spending all available time with the students helping to establish routines and bring some sense of order into what had previously been largely total disorder.

One thing about which he was very clear however was that change had to take place, and take place quickly. He was very prepared to listen to the staff and to consult with them. He was happy for them to be involved in the decision making process. They in return however needed to recognise the concerns as outlined in the statement from OFSTED and would need to work towards resolving issues addressed in the report as quickly as possible. For those not prepared to do so it was evident there was no future for them at NC Primary. For the benefit of the students, and the future direction of the school, they would have to leave and seek employment elsewhere.

The challenges at NC Primary are vast. Simon knows clearly what he wants to do. He is working hard on rebuilding the trust of his staff. He expects there to be some staff changes in the near future enabling the appointment of younger staff with different expectations. They would more likely offer a degree of enthusiasm for learning in their programming, along with providing more appropriate role modelling for the children.

“One of the real difficulties is that no one expects these children to be successful. Most of the parents do not have high aspirations for their children. Teachers have in general looked after their social needs in the past but they have failed to see that these children could do so much better if they were given the opportunity to do so. We want teachers who will allow these children to be successful.”

Simon Webb has taken on a very difficult situation. He will need to use all his leadership skills and experience to implement the changes required. If he is not successful this school will be closed with the children being placed at other schools in the wider neighbourhood. That is not the expressed wish of the parents. They wish to retain their local community school.

Simon sums up his vision very simply:

“I think vision is having the ability to stick your head out of the parapet and look five years ahead. You have to ask what do you want for these children at that time? What is going to be important for them? Then you have to find a way to provide that for them. You have to find a way around the problems that may get in the way. You must always keep focussed on what is important for the children.”

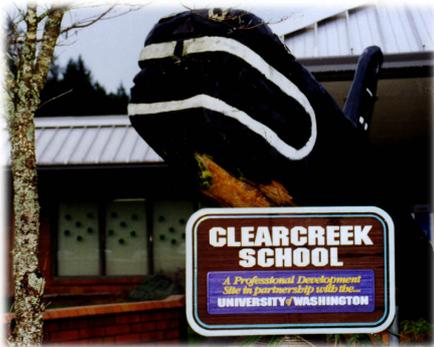


4

Clear Creek School

“Learning through living”

Clear Creek Elementary is a K-6 school situated some 30-35 km West of downtown Seattle. The most direct route is to take a very pleasant 35-minute ferry ride across the Puget Sounds to Bainbridge Island. From there it is another 30 minutes or so to travel across the island on to Silverdale. Clear Creek School is situated at the end of a long unsealed driveway on the outskirts of Silverdale. The school takes its name from the crystal clear salmon creek running through its grounds.



Around 620 students attend the school with almost 75% of these coming from families working at the Naval Submarine Base situated nearby. This, according to the Principal Ms Susan Quick, has had quite an influence on developments at Clear Creek.

A high percentage of students come from low-income families. Many move according to military policy after a two to three year period at this base. This causes a transient population within the school with few students staying throughout their whole K-6 period.

Being a military base a significant number of fathers have met and married their partners while away from the USA. Many of the children's mothers come from Asian countries. Often they do not drive and are therefore confined to their homes or the immediate surrounding areas. Many do not wish to become too involved in the life of the school so consequently there is not a significant degree of parental involvement. Education is seen as the job of the teachers.

Clear Creek School introduced a programme they call *“Micronomics”* or

“*Micro*” some eight years ago. “*Micro*” is a simulated society that involves every student and staff member in the school. It engages all students in the design and operation of their own functioning community within the school.

In *Micro* students:

- Hold jobs
- Produce goods and sell them
- Perform services for pay
- Make decisions
- Form their own government
- Create rules and procedures as needed
- Spend, save and invest
- Budget for housing and transportation
- Run ventures such as publishing, the law, manufacturing, performing arts, banking, computing, art, and more.

“*Micro*” aims to give students learning experiences that mimic the real society they will move on to once they leave school.

When Ms Quick took over as Principal at Clear Creek she was concerned at the manner in which teachers appeared to work in isolation. Each moved into a classroom, closed the door and had little contact with the work of other members of staff. What happened from room to room and across the school seemed to be of little relevance. Teachers saw their responsibilities extending no further than to the children within their own classrooms.

Ms Quick sought some way to unify the school and to provide a forum that would require staff members to discuss their work with others.

She chose “*Micronomics*” as a way of achieving this goal. It was to be the vehicle that would draw staff together into a cohesive unit able to discuss and debate issues that would have an impact on the progress of their students. “*Micro*” was to change the culture of the school.

Following its introduction there was a period when changes being introduced were seen as being very difficult for some staff members. There were those who were very keen on the ideas presented. They were eager to rush off into the unknown with great enthusiasm. They could see the potential to stimulate learning programmes within the school. Others were ambivalent and adopted a wait and see attitude. There were also those members of staff who were strongly opposed to the changes being introduced. They could see only problems and would regularly articulate their concerns.

The Principal saw it would be necessary to bring the staff together in some way through encouraging debate where issues could be freely raised and addressed. When a teacher articulated a concern the Principal put the issue back to the whole staff asking the teachers to find a range of possible solutions. When criticism from outside was heard the Principal would seek verification from the source so again issues could be discussed and debated. The Staff was supported throughout this process during a time when their thinking was being severely challenged.

Several teachers could not adapt to the changes and took the path out of the school seeking employment elsewhere in an environment where they felt more comfortable. Others prospered. New staff members were hired. The school’s direction and its philosophy were discussed at interview so those who did not feel comfortable with the new approach had an opportunity to withdraw before joining the team. Once appointed, commitment was expected.

Initially grant money from a variety of different sources was used to provide appropriate training for staff. A facilitator was employed on a regular basis two days a week. He worked alongside staff members assisting them put the principles of the programme into action.

“*Micro*” takes place four days a week for 35 minutes a day. The miniature

society comprises 22 strands, with around 25 students in each strand. Each strand relates to a theme with specific tasks for completion. Teachers lead strands with students from across all grade levels included in each group.

Different strands are introduced each new school year to allow for changes in teacher strengths and interests, although the core strands of law, police, banking, warehouse, newspaper publishing, and the radio station remain from year to year.

In discussions Ms Quick stated her real vision was to find a common vehicle which could be used to unify the school.

“I believe in the “micro” programme implicitly, however it would not much have mattered what vehicle we used to implement change. I was most interested in pulling the staff together so all had a clear and focused goal to pursue. It is important for there to be a unified language driving the direction of the school. Economics was chosen to be that language. It was new to everyone so no one would have a significant advantage over the others. We would all be able to learn together.”

The micro programme allows teachers to bring passion into their teaching. They can follow a particular area of interest. They can change this from year to year without a feeling of being locked into one strand.

The nature of the programme forces teachers to communicate with each other and not isolate themselves from their peers. The micro society cannot function without such interaction. Teachers have to keep open lines of communication for the society to function. Debate must take place. Often the debate is rigorous with issues sometimes not easily resolved. Lessons are learned that conflict is not necessarily a problem as long as the focus remains on the issues and not on personalities. Under these circumstances conflict can be a positive vehicle for the implementation of change.

The Principal was able to provide hard data indicating the success of the programme with respect to improved learning outcomes for students. Data

showed:

- Reduced behaviour referrals by 70%
- Improved student attitude.
- Improved attendance both of staff and students.
- Total standardised test scores up by 144% since the programme began in 1991
- Improved maths scores – up by 159%
- Improved reading scores – up by 128%
- Improved language scores – up by 129%

Principal Susan Quick stated:

“People are successful in life because they make and set goals. The “micro” programme allows children this control. They are required to set goals and to plan a programme that allows those goals to be met. They learn that they can have a sense of destiny and have power over their own future. They can take control over their own lives.”

Indications are that staff relationships have improved. Teachers now feel they are no longer alone. There is much more sharing of what is happening across the school with more collegiality being evident. Laughter in the staffroom is far more common than ever before.

The concept of having all grade levels integrated for “*Micro*” has ensured grade barriers both for staff and students are broken down. Much greater support across the school is evident with a higher level of understanding across the grades.

Although the initial focus and motivating factor was on economics and the issue of making and spending money, the focus now is more on issues related to communication and working together within a society. Students observed were very articulate. They could clearly communicate what they were doing and took their various roles very seriously indeed.

The “*Police Lieutenant*” was able to verify it had been a very long time since tickets had been issued for offences of physical or verbal abuse.

It was interesting to observe however where issues that impact on our society had impacted within the Clear Creek society. A case was being investigated by the “*Police Force*” of a forged ATM Card. A student had been caught using a forged card to withdraw large sums of ORCA Dollars. (The local school currency.) It had also been necessary to recall all \$100 notes as a considerable number of forged notes were found to be in circulation.

The staff found it interesting to note the problems evident in society today were already surfacing within their own little community.

In asking students what they liked about “*micro*” the following comments were noted from those in the newspaper strand:

“It’s fun!”

“It teaches us about the real world.”

“I like it. I get to go around and interview others for the newspaper.”

“I would like to work in a newspaper and I am learning about it here.”

“It teaches us how to handle money.”

“It gives us some ideas as to what we may like to do later.”

In asking what they thought they might have learned from the programme the following responses were noted, also from students working in the newspaper strand.

“We have to read, write and know our maths well.”

“It helps us learn how to research.”

“I learned how to interview people.”

“It helps with our editing skills.”

“It helps with our grammar and our punctuation.”

Micronomics was certainly an interesting programme to observe. What was more interesting however was the process used by the Principal to

implement change within the school. Ms Quick was very clear as to the goals she sought. She wished to unify the staff and looked for a vehicle she could use to focus all staff members in a common direction. She wanted a “*unifying language.*” “*Micronomics*” was chosen to be that language as it was new to all and everyone was starting on an equal footing. In implementing the programme considerable discussion would be required along with ongoing communication amongst the staff to maintain its functioning.

Strong leadership was evident at Clear Creek. Ms Quick had been able to implement a new programme and drive its development leading towards a more unified staff as well as improved learning outcomes for students. A common purpose and direction for all was established. Staff members were enthusiastic in their endeavours. They were fully committed to the programme and regularly spent time discussing, debating, planning and sharing ideas and student work. Problems that continually arose were resolved along the way with teachers and students working together.

“I believe the school is a community of learners – students, teachers, specialists, administrators, parents, instructional assistants, office staff, custodians, playground supervisors and so forth. Real learning has intrinsic rewards, and human beings find natural joy in learning just as they find joy in discovering more about the world and themselves. Learning is a powerful motivator. Our simulated society, like the pattern of all human civilizations, has a life of its own. This village evolves rapidly, beyond anyone’s control or imagination. I laugh when I think of being ‘in charge’ here.”

“Developing a Vision for Learning in the 21st Century.”

5 Hjulsta Skolor

“Without self esteem you cannot go out in life.”

Hjulsta is a high-density residential suburb on the outskirts of Stockholm, Sweden, at the end of the underground transport line. Hjulsta Skolor, (Hjulsta School), on two adjoining sites, caters for around 700 students from the neighbourhood community at both the elementary and high school levels.

The school, surrounded by a maze of high rise apartments looking down on the play areas, was built in the 1960's to cater for the children of Swedish families moving to the city seeking employment. Now very few Swedes are enrolled. More than 90% of the current roll is immigrant students coming to Sweden with their families to escape conflict in their home countries.

These students arrive from many different nations. Their backgrounds have changed over the years depending upon world politics at the time. They come from Chile, South America, Turkey, Greece and Finland. More recently they have been coming from the African continent and from the Middle East. Over fifty different nationalities are represented.

The two biggest language groups now in the school are Arabic and Greek. Almost all arrive speaking no Swedish at all.



School Principal, Elisabeth Sörhuus, referred to the many social problems existing in the area where poverty and a high degree of unemployment are the norm. The school has a high student turnover with some 30% of the roll changing each year as families become more settled and move to

other areas or move off to join family members elsewhere.

“Our aim is to make the very best school we can from the circumstances we have. These circumstances keep changing over the years and there are many things we cannot change. So we have to set our school goals and change these to meet the differing student needs. We must do the best we can for everyone.”

The school seeks to have every student feel at home from the very first day. This is no easy task when most are unable to speak a word of Swedish and frequently come from a country torn apart by war. Many have lost relatives, often parents. They have seen dreadful things happening, and have often had very bad experiences themselves. Frequently parents and caregivers bring these conflicts with them as they live in apartment blocks alongside those people seen as foes overseas.

This school is very clear as to its priorities. A caring safe environment for all, along with the development within each student of a feeling of self worth, are both seen as essential elements for the school to offer before there is any possibility students will begin to learn. The school works towards achieving these goals through several clearly planned strategies.

The first of these is through a focus on science and the environment. Young students are given seeds to plant in the class garden. They are encouraged to work with their hands and feel the soil. They are shown how to nurture and look after their seeds as they grow. Often they will choose to plant seeds from their home country. Composting is encouraged along with an understanding of how important this is towards helping protect the environment. Left over food scraps from the school’s kitchen provides a regular supply for the compost bins.

It is anticipated through this involvement, students will gain an understanding that with care their tiny seeds will develop into strong healthy plants. They are able to provide the care needed for this growth to occur. They can make a positive impact on their environment.

An animal enclosure has been established for older students. There are rabbits, guinea pigs, hens, mice, fish, a snake and a rather large iguana

lizard. (He was observed sunning himself beside the window upstairs alongside his current caregivers in a biology classroom.)



“The idea is not only to illustrate biological growth but also to have children feel good when they handle the animals and take care of them. They can give the animals love. Every day you can see big boys sitting and patting the hens. This is very important. Many of these children have not had enough love. It seems to work.”

Waste from the animals contributes to the school’s compost supply and students make cakes from eggs collected from the school’s hens. Waste paper is gathered, as are plastics and bottles. It is important for the children to learn to protect the environment in which they are living.

It is not good enough for the school just to tell children how to behave towards protecting the environment. The school must act appropriately and have high expectations for students to do the same.

The second strategy used to help achieve the school’s goals is through the use of music and drama. The Principal considers these two areas to be international languages. Students can arrive on the first day and communicate with others through music and drama. It is compulsory for students to learn to play a musical instrument. Music lessons continue throughout schooling so that by the time they leave in grade 9 every one of them will be proficient in one or more musical instruments.

Students are encouraged to write their own music. Music teachers stay one afternoon a week after school to assist and to enable students to use the school’s equipment. Many regularly stay to play their own music, forming groups and recording their compositions on tape.

Specialist dancing teachers are employed on a part time basis giving all students the opportunity to participate in a range of dance activities. This varies from dance with rhythm and movement with the younger children through to ballroom dancing for the senior students prior to their graduation ball. These dancing lessons are aimed at assisting them grow in confidence and also helping them relate to others within the school community.

Performance is an essential part of the programme and regular performances to parents and the community are held.

“Every student has talent. It is the school’s responsibility to find and develop that talent. Some students are good at music, some at dance. Some are good at drawing and art. Some are good at writing. We constantly look for opportunities where the students can express themselves. They enjoy performing. Teachers ensure performances are of a high standard. The students love the applause and recognition. They begin to understand they do have talent. This helps develop their self esteem.”

There were many examples of this approach evident. One was the Principal’s belief that poetry written by many of the students was of a high literary standard. The messages conveyed reflecting their background experiences were worth sharing with a wider audience. Ms Sörhuus decided to see if it would be possible to publish a small book of children’s poems.

After some searching on her part she found a publisher willing to produce a special edition of children’s poetry written by students from Hjulsta Skolor. The Principal sent this book off for review. Such was the success of these reviews that many people made contact wishing to buy the book. The small book of poems is now in its 4th reprint.

A well-known local musician who read the poems was so touched by the messages conveyed he asked if it would be possible to set them to music. He wrote the music, came to school and auditioned students wishing to sing, made a tape, went to a publisher and subsequently produced a CD. In the Swedish Grammy awards this CD was considered to be one of the four best new CD’s produced that year.

Ms Sörhuus has been able to use this example to show students what is possible and what can be accomplished. From small beginnings great results can be achieved. Poems are now being collected for a new publication and possibly another CD. Poems are arriving on the Principal's desk daily in great numbers from children of all ages throughout the school hoping their work will be good enough to be accepted for the next book – a book of poems on a child's view of the future for the new millennium.

“Performing and publishing are very important. We want our students to know they have lots of talent with much to offer. When they arrive here they often think all is lost and they are worthless. Many people think because they are poor and they are refugees they have little to contribute. I want to go outside the school and tell the world, ‘Look here, we have some very talented pupils. Look what they can do.’ This will help to raise our students’ self esteem.”

A real challenge for the school is parental involvement. Many do not feel comfortable with the Swedish language and often school is seen as a place of authority. For new immigrants many are not too sure what this means in their new country. Often they are very wary of authority.

The standard method of extending general invitations for parents to attend school has not been particularly effective. Instead other strategies are being used. Two or three times a year family dinners are held. Classes send invitations to parents inviting them to come to school and bring along some food. Often parents think, *“I cannot contribute anything to school but I can bring some food.”*

It has been found that now large numbers do come, including young children, parents and often grandparents. The teacher is able to move amongst the groups inconspicuously meeting parents and talking informally with them helping to build trust and establish relationships.

Each month the Principal holds an open forum. This is a very informal evening where parents are advised the Principal will be available should there be any issues they would like to discuss. Coffee and biscuits are

provided. There is no set agenda. Parents do not have to notify their attendance in advance. Some may come and stay for 30 minutes. Some may stay longer. There may be five parents who turn up or some nights there may be fifty.

The informality of this approach is considered more acceptable for some cultures with these forums now providing a very good means for the Principal to communicate with parents within the community. Increasing numbers of parents now regularly participate.

Hjulsta Skolor has put in place many different strategies and programmes aimed at assisting students develop a sense of self worth and a feeling of security in their new environment. The school has become a safe haven within their community. It is neutral territory.

After school classes in a wide range of subject areas are provided at no cost to students. Classes are offered in the more traditional academic areas for those wishing to participate, and also in music, drama, dance, computing, and sport. Large numbers take part with many regularly staying through into the evening.

Each year a ‘scholarship’ is offered to senior students. Those who meet the required standard are rewarded by being given an additional two weeks schooling over the summer holiday period! Already with summer approaching students are anxiously asking for the standard required this year hoping they will be successful in gaining a scholarship enabling them to participate in the summer programme.



“The students use the school after hours anyway whether we offer something or not. It is their backyard. It seems better that we provide some programmes for them. In this way we find there is much less damage to the school and the students benefit from the additional schooling. This gives them an added boost before they leave us and go on to the next school”

Hjulsta Skolor is a school with the focus clearly on the needs of its students. They have come as new immigrants to a country that is completely alien to them. They still have many difficulties to face. It is the Principal's belief that unless the children feel secure in their new environment and develop a sense of self worth they will not be able to learn. Learning will only come when the students feel good about themselves and believe they have something to offer.

Students and staff are all encouraged to be really proud of their school. They are encouraged to work hard, sometimes against the odds, to ensure difficulties from within the community, and problems from the past, do not detract from the focus of the school and what is best for their students.

“We must never give up. Even if things seem very difficult at times we must not stop. We cannot let vandalism or destruction stop our direction. We must always keep moving forward.”

Clearly this school has a very focussed vision. The special needs of students attending have been identified with priorities set. Students are proud of their school and what is being achieved. This was evident from the way two guides spoke of their school and proudly showed the garden areas, the greenhouses, the animal enclosures, the lizard sunning himself, the published posters around the school featuring student art, the recreation areas with efforts to improve both the indoor and the outdoor environment, and the many other aspects of this school which make it unique.

What was also special was the fact that these students were working as guides in a language that was not their first language, nor even their second language. In fact this school could provide guides for visitors in almost any language sought. Here was another example of the school seeking

opportunities to promote the worth of each student and to show those outside the school the talent which exists within.



“The most important goal for the school is to encourage the pupils to feel good about themselves as human beings, to raise their self esteem. That is the most important thing we can do. Then later when they have learned the language and become more settled they can move on to their studies. It is very difficult if you do not have self esteem to go out in life.”

6 Kent School District

“We must open doors or nothing will happen.”

Kent School District, Seattle, Washington State, USA, has five Senior High Schools, six Junior High Schools and twenty seven Elementary Schools within its boundaries. A focus for the District and its vision for the future is the Technology Centre. This provides the structure and the resources aimed at assisting teachers throughout the region meet many of the challenges faced in implementing computer technology within their classrooms.

Rick Feutz, Centre Director, outlined the district’s vision with respect to Information Technology. He discussed the district’s commitment to providing the facilities and infrastructure that would best meet the needs of teachers and students now and in the future. This commitment extended also to other interested parties in the wider school district.

Central to the successful implementation of this vision has been the development of a district ‘*Intranet.*’

As Rick Feutz said:

“We wanted to provide a service which would not only support the teachers working within our district but also other interested groups within the wider community. We wanted to do what we could to help our teaching staff meet the challenges technological changes were bringing. We knew that unless we provided a good deal of assistance little change would occur in most classrooms.

It was also important for us to let everyone in the community know the good things which were regularly happening in our schools. Only around 15% of the adults in our community have children attending school. In the American situation, where these community members are voting on funding issues to support schools it is essential for them to have a good understanding of what

schools are seeking to do.

A real issue for us to resolve was how we could provide this information in a cost-effective way. The development of an Intranet seemed the logical solution. The Intranet was designed to bring the wider community into the school environment and to provide an opportunity for community members to have a greater understanding of what happens in our schools.

The Intranet has enabled us to break down barriers and avoid schools being isolated from the rest of the community. We hope now when negative publicity appears in the media parents will say, ‘My school is great. I know what is going on there. It must be those other schools they are talking about.’”

The Technology Centre is the hub where developments take place. A number of full time staff, supplemented by teachers seconded to work in the centre for a period of time, are responsible for ensuring the Intranet meets current and future needs. Individual schools and departments are responsible for keeping their own page sections up to date.

The Intranet provides much general information about schools and district programmes. It also provides links through to Internet sites that support curriculum learning outcomes. An important task for those working in the Technology Centre is to ascertain curriculum requirements and conduct searches of the net for appropriate sites that could support student learning. In providing these links teachers can always be assured students are accessing safe sites through the Intranet. Much time is saved with students accessing information more quickly without the need for lengthy searches.

Rick Feutz described it in this way:

“The net has been developed to offer support for teachers and a safe playground for our students. It has been built to share. We want people to build the system for themselves. We know that when people are given opportunities to build something for themselves they will value it more highly. So long as we continue to provide these opportunities then developments will grow exponentially.”

In providing this ease of access information has been made available to many more users. Users can get information from home, when travelling throughout the region or country and even from off shore. Issues relating to various platforms are taken away. Netscape used runs on Macs and PC's allowing schools to have an open architecture with students at home having equal access to the material. In a similar way this ease of access is provided to teachers, parents, technology specialists and other community members.

Parents are able to view student work on the web. There is a glossary of math's terms available that assist parents when helping their children with homework. A matrix is provided to show district learning objectives. Student artwork can be viewed.

Teachers find the site increasingly helpful. Over the years they have seen more and more time taken with greater amounts of paper work. Now much of this can be done on the net. Teachers can book themselves into an inservice course. Positions vacant within the district are advertised. A “Teachers’ Toolbox” site provides a wealth of information designed to assist teachers in many different ways.

Units of work are regularly added to the site. Teachers have been encouraged to share work with others. A resource bank is being developed providing teachers with units of work used by their peers.

The Intranet described is accessed through the home site:

www.kent.wednet.edu

This takes the user to the Kent School District's home page. Here choices and links are available depending upon information required. There are links for parents, a listing of schools within the district, links for students to follow, links for community members, for teachers, for staff, for information relating to the curriculum, and a general services information link.

It serves little purpose to discuss these links in any great detail in this report, as the best way of gaining further information is to access the site directly. In this way it can be explored at the reader’s leisure and returned to many times to see changes regularly made. A ‘walk through’ the Intranet allows the viewer to see how it can readily support a number of different interest groups.

Some suggested links to view:

- **‘Teachers’ Toolbox’** - A site developed particularly for teachers. It provides a wealth of further links to explore. It is well worth a look.

www.kent.wednet.edu/toolbox

- **‘Staff Development’** - A site listing staff development opportunities for teachers. This is a good model that could be developed in New Zealand. Here is a listing of courses available. Teachers can sign up for themselves and immediately see if there are spaces available.

www.kent.wednet.edu/KSD/HR/SD/index.html

- **‘Curriculum’** - A site giving support to teachers in a number of different curriculum areas. Again there are links through to different subject areas.

www.kent.wednet/curriculum/

- **‘Student Work Samples’** - This site links through to classroom web pages and a range of class projects. It also links through to an interesting site, ‘Collab-O-Write’. This encourages students from throughout the District, or throughout the World for that matter, to add on to a story part of which has already been written. It is an interesting concept.

www.kent.wednet.edu:80/toolbox/portfolio.html

- **‘Community’** - Here general information relevant to the District is recorded. Some of this provides straight knowledge for those wishing such information. Other links are far more interesting such as the virtual tour of the local fire station and ‘CyberBios’ providing a history of local community leaders.

www.kent.wednet.edu/community

- **‘Web Development Process’** – This site answers many of the questions which may be in people’s minds. It provides information such as the type of software used, problems encountered etc.

www.kent.wednet.edu/help/web_process.html

- **‘Homepage For New Math’s Teachers.’** – This page was created to give new math’s teachers suggestions and help with their teaching. It has some interesting ideas.

www.clarityconnect.com/webpages/terri/terri.html

There are many more sites and links well worth exploring. Those listed will give some idea as to the power of the site for all interested groups within the Kent School District. The initial vision to provide a site that supported education in a very broad sense within the District has been realised. That is not the end. Developments are still continuing. The involvement of teachers is an obvious strength. The intention is for teachers to see a need and then to take ownership for what develops. Through the concept of sharing all within the district are able to benefit. Much of the repetition and reinvention is being done away with. Teachers are able to share their work. In return others support them throughout the District. This openness and support is having a very positive effect on all who work there. The Intranet is now an integral part of education within the region.

Of course these developments have not just happened. Considerable resourcing has been provided from the District level to set up the current structures. In terms of ongoing support however time saved by teachers is considerable. The Intranet has opened up a new way of thinking. It has moved teachers forward into realising that computer technology is here to stay. No longer can they ignore its influence. They can however use the resources which are being provided to assist them come to terms with these changes and realise through a combined effort, an openness, and a philosophy of sharing, all can benefit, not least of course the students for whom they are responsible.

As Rick Feutz said:

“We must open doors. We must provide the resources and the opportunities. If we don't do that then nothing will happen.”

7 **Kobi Nazrul School**

“Poverty is not an excuse.”

Kobi Nazrul school, named after the Bengali poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, is situated just off Whitechapel Road in East London. Ninety-five percent of the students come from Bangladesh. Most have no English when they arrive in the nursery school. Sixty percent of the students have free school dinners, which is a statistic used to indicate the level of poverty within the community. Some 60% of parents are unemployed.

This would appear to be a school with the odds stacked against it. What was found however was quite the opposite!

Ms Ruth Miskin, Principal since the school opened four years ago, stated the fact these students come from Bangladesh is irrelevant. The fact that most arrive speaking no English is also irrelevant. Her vision for the school is very clear and very simple.

- To have the highest academic standards for all children and not just to have a school with a few performing highly.

“All children must have a chance to achieve, not just to their potential but to achieve highly academically.”

- To ensure the highest standards of behaviour throughout the school

“This comes from achieving well at school. When children are successful behaviour problems just disappear.”

- To develop confidence and a high level of self esteem for all children.

“Confidence and self esteem can only be achieved from within. It is the school’s responsibility to develop confidence and self esteem in every individual. They gain self respect through achievement.”

Ms Miskin stated many schools use a whole range of excuses for low achievement. Poverty and home background are very frequently given as reasons for pupils performing poorly.

“So many of my colleagues talk about the number of students they have who qualify for free school dinners as if that is the reason they are failing at school. What have free school dinners got to do with achievement? How relevant is that?”



Kobi Nazrul is situated in a predominantly Muslim community. When the school was establishing its direction the Principal did not try to persuade parents as to what she thought was important for their children. Instead she listened to their hopes and their concerns. What she found was that the parents were very clear as to what they wanted. They knew success at school would be essential for the future. A good education was seen as essential to enable their children to move beyond what had been possible for many of them. Education was the key that would lead to future employment and success for their children.

The focus within this school is clearly on learning. Ethnic and cultural issues

have little place on the timetable.

“Many schools in similar communities say we value the children’s culture and end up just being very patronizing – putting saris up on the wall, finding pictures of Bangladesh, singing ethnic songs, providing a whole range of second language books. The trouble is too often what happens is the focus on the culture takes over and the children end up not being taught. The school forgets what it is supposed to be doing.

Parents do not want us to focus on their culture. They can manage that very well at home. They want the school to ensure their children can read and write and are successful at school.”

This school does not have Bengali books. The children would not be able to read them even if they were there. The rationale is that this is an English school and the sooner the children master English the better it will be for them. As so few speak English on arrival teachers or assistants who can speak Bengali are employed to assist. This language support however is quickly phased out. The assistance is given in the nursery and reception classes only. After that all tuition is in English.

Few pictures related to the children’s own cultural backgrounds were seen on the walls. What was observed was a vibrant environment reflecting the children’s own work. There were also many professional photographs around the school showing well presented, obviously happy children participating in a wide range of school activities. Here were some interesting role models to which the children could aspire.

This is a school that publicly states it has no failures in reading at all. It will not accept failure for any student! There are no students classified as having special needs with respect to learning programmes! In fact the school has featured in a number of news articles owing to results being achieved. Children from similar backgrounds in neighbouring schools are seen as failing yet here, in an area with many problems, high success rates and standards are the norm. National test results put these students in the top five- percent.

“It has often been reported that our students are achieving as well or better than white working class children. I do not want our children compared to poor white working class children. I want them to be compared to upper middle class white children as these are the ones with whom they will have to compete for jobs in the future.”

Reading is seen as the key to the school’s success. An early emphasis placed on reading is seen as the key to later successes in other areas. The school’s reading programme is based on a phonological scheme devised by Ms Miskin. The programme is one which all teachers are expected to follow. A very clear scheme of work is provided to ensure consistency across the school. Much support is given by the Principal to ensure all teachers are able to implement the programme as intended.

In addition to teachers knowing what to do, it is also considered important for them to know what not to do. They need to know how not to fill in the day.

“I have often seen teachers in other schools giving children a worksheet to colour in showing all the words starting with the letter ‘b’. If they can colour in the correct words they do not need to do the exercise. They are just filling in time. Too much time is wasted on non-important activities at school. School need to get on and use the time available for real learning.”

In visiting this school I could feel the passion of the vision from the Principal. Kobi Nazrul is obviously a highly successful school. This has been recognised by its Ofsted reports and by the results achieved in national testing programmes. Hard data is available to support the success of their methods.

Consistency is evident across the school as a result both of the clear programmes of work developed and the monitoring by the principal to ensure these are implemented as intended.

It is Ms Miskin’s belief that most teachers do not know what it is possible for children to achieve. Many would state they have high expectations for their students but they do not understand what children can really achieve. Expectations are too low. Teachers too often accept what they are given

rather than set a high standard and have children work towards achieving the standard set.

It all seems so easy. “Have you had any difficulties?” I asked.

Finding the right teachers and keeping them was an on going difficulty. The school is hoping to increase the number of Bengali teachers from within the community. The difficulty is to find appropriately trained and qualified teachers who can speak English adequately. Many who have been trained in Bangladesh do not speak English well enough to be an appropriate role model for the children. The Principal was adamant the best teachers would be employed irrespective of their cultural background. These would be those who are prepared to work hard for the benefit of the children and provide an appropriate role model for them to follow.

Another difficulty evident is that frequently teachers are offered work in other schools or districts at a higher rate of pay. They are sometimes targeted, as it is now known they are working at a successful school. The challenge is to make the job attractive for the teachers at Kobi Nazrul so they will want to continue working there.

In visiting this school it was obvious there is clear and strong leadership from the principal. All staff members know the direction the school is heading and have clear guidelines as to how to get there. There is a clear scheme of work for teachers to follow giving not only curriculum guidelines but also support as to how these could be achieved.

The principal would acknowledge that initially the drive for the school’s direction and the means to get there came from her. Some staff initially believed they would be better to work at another school and made the move. Others liked the direction and gave wholehearted support. New members of staff have been appointed on the basis of their commitment to support the philosophy and direction.

“What started off as my terms with the teachers has now become our terms. The teachers are now all working together. They like it here.”

It was evident all staff members have opportunities to be involved in decision making. All spoken to were very supportive of the school’s direction and policies. They were very supportive of the Principal and very proud of the school’s achievements.

I believe the lesson to be learned from Kobi Nazrul is that high standards and success can be achieved where these are expected. Too often near enough is accepted as good enough. This school is very clear as to what it wants. It has set high standards for itself, for the staff working there, and for the children attending. The school will not allow any child to fail. Excuses for failure are not accepted. The school does all it can to ensure every child is successful. If this sometimes means additional resources need to be found then that has to be what is done even though funding is limited.

Kobi Nazrul provides an excellent example of a school with strong leadership and a very clear and focused vision. This vision has been communicated to all and implemented for the benefit of the children who attend and for the community it serves.

“I cannot stand being in a low achieving school. It is a matter of pride. Our children will achieve irrespective of anything. Poverty is not an issue. Poverty does not stop achievement. Poverty is not an excuse for failure. All children can be successful. Some just take a little longer to get there.”

8 Two Mile Ash Middle School

“At my last school the children didn’t seem so important.”

Two Mile Ash Middle School, a four year Grant Maintained (bulk funded) school, is situated almost an hour’s fast train ride north of London, in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. The school roll has grown considerably over recent years from around 370 pupils, to a roll now in excess of 680. This increase is considered to be due primarily to the high regard in which the school is held by the community and the increasing number of students who are seeking to enrol from further afield.



On first arriving it was clear students were the focus at this school. Two pupil councilors were on hand to greet and guide visitors around the site. The foyer had a small seating area where pupils who had achieved success in the classroom could be observed working. This was recognition for these students who

could be seen by visitors to the school and gain further affirmation for their efforts. A bulletin board listing students of the week and noting other successes was in a prominent place. George, the school’s mascot, a large stuffed gorilla, sat in pride of place.

Christopher and Rebecca, the councilor guides, were asked what it was they particularly liked about their school.

Christopher – *“I like the way we are always encouraged to strive for success. I like all the merit awards and the certificates that encourage us to do our best. There is always something to try to push us forward.”*

Amanda – *“You don’t always have to do something to try to win. You just have to have a go and do your best. It’s just having a go that counts.”*

Christopher – *“My parents really like the teachers here. So do I.”*

Amanda – *“Ever since I came to this school everyone has been so supportive of the different things I do. At my last school the children didn’t seem so important. It was as if the school was for the teachers and what they did but I think it is quite different here.”*

Principal Jim Hudson arrived at Three-Mile Ash (TMA) eight years ago.

“When I arrived at TMA it seemed to be a coasting school. It was really well resourced with an excellent record but it seemed to be a sleeping school. It did not seem to have that special something which really good schools have. It did not seem to differentiate enough for the children. There was a certain sameness in what was happening.”

Jim held a community meeting early on to find out what it was which parents considered important for their children. He believed this a logical thing to do and was surprised to find little community consultation had gone on before. What he discovered was that there was a high degree of consistency in what parents did want. They wanted their children to be motivated to learn at school. They wanted them to learn the basics of literacy and numeracy. They wanted a safe learning environment and for good habits of citizenship to be developed. If it was possible they hoped their children would be inspired along the way. They also were looking for that extra something.

Jim Hudson knew these goals could not be achieved unless a common vision was formed. This would need to be developed collectively and implemented throughout the school. Consistency would be essential. Parents and the wider community would need to understand the message. The Principal would need to live and breathe the message. Most importantly the children themselves would have to take ownership of the vision.

“It took us some time to implement change. We agreed on what we wanted. We wanted a community where everybody understood what we were working to achieve. Now all share the same values. We want to do right by and for each other. We want to do the best we can for every child here. We want to look for individuality, to encourage students to be expressive and to be proud.”

Initially there was some movement of staff as those teachers who did not feel comfortable regarding the changes taking place shifted elsewhere. Others became excited about the new focus and could see how students would benefit.

It was agreed the pastoral care of students would be an early focus. The school looked at how it could assist those having difficulties. Programmes were put in place to identify these students and to provide support.

“We wanted to encourage the children to seek help when needed. We knew they were going to make mistakes. We wanted to help them open doors so they could shine their light into the room they step into. You can’t push them through the door. You must give them time. You can give them the confidence to open the door for themselves so they can shine their light into the room they step into. You have to let them make their mark. We want them to realise that each one of them is precious as an individual.”



As the school’s vision developed structures were put in place to communicate this direction to all. Further meetings were held with parents. They indicated a desire to become more involved in the functioning of the school and hoped to gain a better understanding of what was happening at school on a day to day basis.

Regular curriculum newsletters were introduced to outline topics and work to be covered over the next school term. This helped take some of the mystery out of the school curriculum. Parents were able to understand more clearly what it was their children were doing. They felt able to offer increasing levels of support often providing resources that could assist the

programme.

After school classes were established. Some of these were set up to assist students needing additional help in areas of the curriculum. Some provided opportunities for the children to complete their homework at school and make use of the school’s resources. There were sporting groups and cultural groups. Classes were set up through to 6.00pm for those parents requesting supervision until they arrived home from work. The school chose to listen to parents and sought to provide what they desired within the limits of resources available.

The Principal ensured teachers were consulted and involved in discussions throughout the change process. Once the vision was clear the issue became how it could best be introduced across the school in every classroom for every student,

“The worst thing for a Principal is to have pockets of excellence within the school. It can be very difficult for teachers when students who have had a really brilliant experience one-year find themselves in a class where the teaching is not so fiery. Once expectations and standards have been lowered then these teachers have to be helped through this or else they have to have it explained that this is not the place for them.”

As staff changed opportunities arose to appoint new teachers prepared to work towards achieving the school’s vision. Teachers who were committed to developing good working relationships with the pupils were sought. The school looked for those prepared to work toward what was in the best interests of the students and gear their teaching to meet the student’s needs.

Pupils were involved in discussions throughout the process. A pupil council was established where opportunities were given for students to make genuine contributions to the school’s future directions. Peer group expectations helped. Once the direction was established with groups of students they then became role models for those who followed. They modelled behaviour and work habits that became the expected standard

throughout the school.

A Principal’s suggestion box was placed in the foyer where students could record concerns. These were read by the Principal and acted upon if appropriate.

“Children should be listened to. So often problems arise simply because teachers fail to listen to what the children are saying. It’s not that they have the right to make policy. That should not need to be spelt out. It is just that mostly what they are saying makes sense. So often they are right if only teachers would listen.”

It is interesting to note that in discussing this point further with the student guides this suggestion box, although it still exists, is seldom now used. The reasoning being, according to the guides, is that issues are now raised through the pupil council. This has become the forum for discussions and concerns. The suggestion box has all but become redundant.

The student council with appropriate support has developed many facilities for the benefit of students. A quiet outside garden area was established for those students who wished to be outside but wanted a peaceful area where they could sit and read, play board games or simply sit and talk with their friends.

Plans are currently being drawn up for a millennium garden project featuring a courtyard, pond and new planting area. The council has put together a permanent art collection with outstanding student art collected over a number of years.

The Principal, along with a group of pupils, put together what is known as the “TMA Creed.” This outlines the guiding principles that have been established for all working at TMA School to follow. This creed, recorded below, is highly visible all around the school. Sections of the Creed appear on classroom walls and corridors across the site. Pupils know it well and it was obvious it has become an important focus for the students.

Our TMA CREED

There can never be another you. You are more than just special.....you are unique.

As a human being you will develop qualities and strengths that should astound you. Use these strengths to overcome weaknesses.

Never carry a prejudice for it will harm you, but always listen well. There is never an end to learning.

Enlighten others through kindness and reason. Above all be fair. Trust in yourself and search for the best in others.

Always view the dawn as a new beginning and let your sunsets be full of memories. Time should be the canvas of your dreams.

Let the world be your masterpiece....colour it with happiness, share in the joy of others and be proud of your own success.

This is your time. You are the artist who will inspire others.

LET TMA BE YOUR ACADEMY

Two-Mile Ash Middle School is an example of a school that clearly exists to serve the interests of students attending. This is evident from the first point of entry for visitors into the school foyer through to the relaxed way in which students in the classroom respond to visitors. Students speak with pride about their school and tell how it has helped them grow in confidence and how it encourages them to do their best. They talk of the school’s creed and have a good understanding of its meaning and how they try to apply this to their day to day life at the school.

Academically the school is highly successful. It received a glowing report from OFSTED that referred in particular to the responsiveness of the children and the warm friendly atmosphere in addition to the high standards being achieved across the school.

Students are clearly the focus of all that happens at TMA. Many strategies exist to encourage them to strive to achieve their best. They are seen as having an important and a real role to play in the running of the school. They have been instrumental in setting up many of the structures currently in place.

It is of particular interest to reflect on the principal's perception of the school when he first arrived. He described it as a 'coasting' school. This is rather an apt term to describe schools that, although seen as 'good' schools by their communities, have done little to make a real difference for students over the years. 'Coasting' schools exist on their past. They do not have that special sparkle to distinguish them from others. They do not have their own special character. They move along at a steady pace without making a real difference. 'Coasting' becomes a habit that is hard to break. It becomes comfortable and predictable.

The problem is that it is all too easy for principals and teachers to fall into the 'coasting' habit, to become complacent assuming all is well. It is easy to drift on from year to year without learning from what has been achieved, or not achieved before.

As Jim Hudson said:

“You cannot stand still. No school can. Schools are either going forwards or they are going backwards. We must continually be looking to see where we should be going next. This is a huge challenge. The key is to do it for the child.”

“Developing a Vision for Learning in the 21st Century.”

9 Valley Stream School

“Information is not education”

The statement, *“Information is not education,”* is painted boldly on a sign which sits on the art teacher’s desk at Valley Stream School, in the Valley Stream District, New York. Valley Stream is a large elementary school some thirty minutes train ride from Manhattan, through Queens on Long Island.

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Instruction, Dr Robert Aloise, talked with pride of the work being done throughout the District. He explained how the Superintendent, Dr Martin Brooks, had introduced the ‘*constructivist*’ approach to teaching and learning following his appointment some years previously. This came from his concern at what he observed happening in large numbers of classrooms. He found students were spending the greater proportion of their time working from textbooks and workbooks on rather low level activities. Little was being done to encourage the development of higher order thinking skills. Students seldom challenged what was being presented. Few opportunities were provided for them to discuss their work with others or to be able to work in-groups.

Dr Aloise:

“Dr Brooks believed in what he called the ‘chaos’ theory of education. Before change can occur you have to shake everything up and see what happens. Then with direction and guidance you are able to bring about change. Valley Stream has now become a constructivist district. We like to have teachers construct activities so that children can arrive at their own conclusions, their own meaning on the world. We believe this will prepare them for life. We believe this is what life is all about. It is about meeting people, working with people and sharing ideas.”

In visiting Valley Stream School it was clear this process was well in place. It was evident a very clear vision and direction for student learning had been established throughout the school. The constructivist approach was well understood by teachers and implemented in classrooms visited.

One class teacher, Mrs. Viviano had a number of activity centres in her classroom providing a wide selection of resource material from which students could select. Material was provided to cater for students with differing ability levels. Each would be able to undertake research at their own level. Each student could apply their own level of skill and knowledge to a task and still be able to meet the same end goals as everyone else in the room irrespective of ability level.

Students were observed using a wide range of resources, working individually and in small groups to meet the programme requirements specified for the day. The teacher took on the role of the ‘coach’, supporting and guiding as required. She circulated throughout the room, giving help and offering encouragement. Where students were having particular difficulties she sought help from other students to see if they could assist solve the problem.

It was interesting to observe students helping each other. They were not simply providing answers. They were discussing and questioning to ensure understandings were gained.

Mrs. Viviano stated her belief that when children discover solutions to problems themselves they gain a deeper understanding and retain knowledge longer. Her responsibility was to carefully plan class programmes to ensure there were ample opportunities for this discovery to occur.

In planning the programme she would initially look to provide familiar material prior to any new learning concepts being introduced. In this way students were able to build on their previous experiences, reinforce these understandings, and subsequently move on to new learning. They were able to continually build on prior concepts and construct their new knowledge. Tasks set were open-ended allowing for students to work at their own level. In working this way those students with special needs could create their own learning. Those with differing learning styles could also work in the manner

which best suited them.

Mrs. Viviano:

“The theory behind constructivism is that people apply their knowledge and make it work to fit their needs. Students need to have some background first before they can delve in and begin exploring otherwise they are not exactly sure what it is they are exploring.”

Students were observed working on maths, science and language activities. They were able to set about solving the problems in any manner they chose. They knew there would not be one ‘right’ way of working. Some chose to work individually while most preferred to work with others in small groups. There was considerable discussion within the room as possible solutions were discussed and difficulties resolved.

Teacher directed lessons were given where it was considered appropriate for curriculum coverage or where common issues were evident within the room. Groupings changed regularly according to identified need.

As a unit of work was completed students were required to present their new learning to peers and to students in other classes. This was seen as an important part of the programme. It not only gave students the opportunity to develop their communication skills but was also an important indicator as to what each child had learned. The process of sharing the knowledge gave the teacher an opportunity to observe and to assess progress.

Mrs. Viviano:

“I want all my students to grow in self confidence. In order for them to learn they have to feel good about themselves.”

The process required teachers to keep detailed records on the progress of each student. There were clear curriculum goals that were a requirement for the District. Some basic testing was taken to assess these basic curricular requirements. Anecdotal records were kept on the progress of each child. These were constantly being reassessed to see future developments needed

and to ensure curriculum coverage.

Mrs. Viviano:

“We want children to understand that in life there are many ways to solve a problem. Gone are the days when the teacher says, ‘Be quiet.’ Discussion and debate are important parts of learning. They can learn so much from each other.

We also want them to know that in life they can be a little divergent. It is OK to be different. They can create their own way to solve problems and know it is OK to do so. They will feel more confident knowing they can do this.”

District Superintendent, Dr Martin Brooks, along with a colleague Dr Jacqueline Brooks, published a book entitled “The Case for Constructivist Classrooms.” Here they state it is essential for educators to make important paradigm shifts and move away from the teacher-talk dominated classroom approaches of the past. Strategies are needed which will encourage students to think, to question and to demonstrate an understanding of their knowledge. Reform in education must start with a focus on how students learn and how teachers teach.

They outline the constructivist view as one where each learner makes sense of the world around them by synthesising new experiences into what is already know and understood. New knowledge is built up on the basis of that which is already held.

Brooks and Brooks go on to say that if this is in fact the way in which new knowledge is gained, then there are significant problems in the structures which exist today in many of our schools.

“Teachers often disseminate knowledge and generally expect students to identify and replicate the fields of knowledge disseminated.

Secondly the information teachers disseminate to students is directly aligned with the information offered by textbooks, providing students with only one view of complex issues, one set of truths.

Third, most classrooms structurally discourage cooperation and require students to

work in relative isolation on tasks that require low level skills, rather than higher order reasoning.

Fourth student thinking is devalued in most classrooms. When asking students questions most teachers seek not to enable students to think through intricate issues but to discover whether students know the ‘right’ answers.

Fifth, schooling is premised on the notion that there exists a fixed world that the learner must come to know. The construction of new knowledge is not as highly valued as the ability to demonstrate mastery of conventionally accepted understandings.”

(Brooks and Brooks – p4-5)

What was particularly unique with Valley Stream was that not only was there a very clear and focused vision for the school, but this vision for learning was also being implemented across a whole school district. To achieve this goal much effort had been put into the area of staff development. Teachers had been given opportunities to work with others not only from their own school, but also with teachers from throughout the District. Dr Brooks wished to see the constructivist principles applied both for student learning and also for teacher growth and development. He wished teachers to develop their new understandings based on the understandings they previously held. He wanted them to think metacognitively in a manner similar to that expected from students.

Teachers work in teams and use peer-coaching techniques to learn from each other. New teachers to the area undertake an orientation programme. This is mandatory. Those who have been working in the area for some time are able to run the seminars. The District has begun to build its own supply of ‘good practice’ videos which help with the understanding of constructivist teaching principles applied to the classroom.

The success of this approach throughout the District was evident. Classrooms were busy productive centres with students observed working independently on a variety of authentic learning tasks. Discipline problems were not evident. Teachers were able to focus on providing assistance to

students as and where it was required.

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr Robert Aloise, stated that Valley Stream was not a test driven district. It was considered more essential for schools to put energies into effective programmes. Where this occurred then the children would do well on the tests anyway.

He was able to provide hard data that showed this to be the case. Significant improvements in student learning had been achieved over the past six years since constructivist programmes were introduced throughout the District.

Perhaps the final comment should come from one of the students.

“I like learning this way. I learn more and its much more fun here than at my last school. The only thing I don't like is if you get in a group where people don't pay attention and goof off!”



10 Woodlands Middle School

“Keep in mind what is right for kids.”

Woodlands Middle School, Gurnee, about 60km north of Chicago, is a relatively new school that opened in 1997 as a purpose built middle school for students in grades 6 to 8. It is the largest middle school under one roof in the midwestern part of the United States. The school was constructed specifically with the 21st century in mind providing the newest technology available to schools for its students. It is certainly an impressive and particularly well resourced school site.

The 318,000sq-ft building is set in over 25 acres of grounds in the rapidly growing Woodland School District. The current roll is 1800 students with facilities provided to cater for up to 2000 students. Additional property adjacent to the school has been set aside to allow for future growth up to a maximum roll of 3000.



Each of the 80 classrooms is computer equipped with Internet access, a multi-media retrieval system plus satellite television. Every classroom has a TV monitor, overhead projector, telephone, individual climate control and

automatic light sensing system that will turn off the overhead lighting when there is no activity in the room. Master classroom controls allow the teacher to use any of these facilities with ease.

The average classroom is comparatively large allowing ample space for students with the school having set a target of no more than 25 students per classroom.

In addition to general classrooms there are a number of specialist rooms including life skills rooms for the curriculum areas of cooking, sewing, child development and consumerism. There are applied practical arts rooms for instruction in art, woodworking, plastics, basic electricity and plumbing. (Here students learn to install and repair plumbing structures such as sinks, toilets and showers.)

The school has four lower level and two upper level gymnasium areas in its three-floor design. These have easily dropped dividers allowing maximum flexibility in the way the space can be used.

An additional multi purpose room is available for physical education, aerobics or table games. With the dividers withdrawn a total of 3000 people can be seated for special assemblies or parent evenings. A main stage area, situated between the cafeteria and the gymnasium provides additional seating should that be required.

The school has a music room, two art rooms, two tiered choir rooms, two band rooms and a very large library/learning centre. A purpose built TV studio, along with a spacious “board room” allows students to plan and broadcast news bulletins and other programmes across the network to all classrooms.

Two computer labs, one with around 35 PC’s, and another with around 35 Apple Macintosh machines are available for student use. There are two

specialist “Tech 2000” rooms which are state of the art laboratories incorporating hands on, purpose built, learning stations providing technical instruction in the areas of hydroponics, laser, wind tunnels, animation, robotics and fibre optics.

All these technical facilities are controlled from a very spacious and comprehensive “head room.” Permanent staff is employed here to maintain the extensive and varied range of technical equipment and to ensure all facilities are available for teacher use.



In discussing the vision for the Woodland School District and for the Woodland Middle School in particular with District Superintendent, Dr Dennis Conti, it was clear the District’s emphasis was on how the facilities within this new and innovatively designed building could best be used to meet student learning needs. Considerable attention had been given to the school design and although there was obvious pride expressed with respect to the building itself, it was evident it was seen purely as a resource to assist teachers achieve maximum success for their students.

Dr Conti emphasised it was no longer appropriate for teachers to teach the way most taught 10-15 years ago. They must continually upskill and adapt their teaching styles to meet the needs of today’s children. Those children in school now will be out in the work force in the 21st century. It is the school’s responsibility to prepare them for the challenges they will undoubtedly face. Teachers must continually grow professionally to be in a position to cater for student needs

Dr Conti stated:

“Teachers must not become “cookie cutters.” Students do not all learn at the same pace. For the school to be successful in ensuring all students do have the opportunity to learn then the staff is the single most important ingredient. If the right people can

be hired then the school will be successful.”

Right, in Dr Conti’s view, does not mean teachers have been to College and been certificated. Right means they are willing to become life long learners, as would be expected from their students Graduation is only the beginning. Teachers must continue to learn to take professional development courses, to read journals, and to debate and challenge what happens within their class and within the school.

Dr Conti saw the greatest challenge for any school as being the appointment of the most appropriate teachers. He emphasised there was a need to find those prepared to continually grow and develop. Teachers should recognise the need to regularly undertake professional development courses that ensured they continued to grow professionally in order to best meet student needs.

The staff selection process at Woodlands begins with the usual structured interview. What is considered of greater importance than the answers to questions raised however is the passion demonstrated by applicants for teaching and learning during the interview. The interview process is designed with this end in mind. Those involved in the interview are seeking to find the applicant’s values, their enthusiasm for teaching, and to see whether they would be good role models for children. If passion for children and teaching is not demonstrated then these applicants are not hired no matter how well qualified their documentation indicates.

The expectation at Woodlands Middle School is that teachers must provide what is best for the students in their care at all times. The needs of the students are seen to come first irrespective of any other factors. Outside influences should not be allowed to divert teachers from their primary responsibilities. It is made clear to teachers that a high level of commitment is expected from those seeking to work at Woodlands. It is explained that the commitment level expected is the same as that which would be expected

from a parent for one of their own children.

“Regardless of what happens to me in life I am committed to the children who attend here. It is important at all times to keep in mind the vision of what is right for kids. That is why we are here.”

It is clear at Woodlands Middle School teachers are expected to be very committed to their work. They are responsible for planning programmes to ensure all students meet with success. This planning is regularly checked to ensure appropriate work has been planned. It is the school’s philosophy that all students can and will learn. Teachers are expected to put this philosophy into action. Should appropriate resources not be available then teachers are expected to improvise, to make some, or to make a case for the appropriate resource to be supplied. Excuses for failing to provide for each student are not accepted. It is expected that teachers will not give up on any child. They are required to ensure all students are successful with their learning outcomes. The onus is on the teacher to seek whatever assistance is required to ensure student needs are met.

In order for this vision to be achieved it has been recognised the school must put in place appropriate strategies to support its teachers. Staff development is seen as being essential. Areas of need are regularly identified with development programmes put in place as required.

An example of one such development programme recently implemented was in the area of differentiated instruction. In surveying classrooms and teachers it was found most engaged in whole class teaching. Little evidence was found where any allowance was made for individual differences in student learning abilities. Seldom did teachers distinguish between teaching and learning and tended to focus on teaching to the middle group within the class. The issue of whether the students had really learned anything was seldom addressed apart from a series of test results. Little was done with the results gathered to determine future programming to meet identified learning

needs.

Following intensive staff development evidence demonstrated this had now changed. Teachers are now more regularly showing in their planning how they intend to cater for the range of student abilities within their class and how they intend putting their plans into action.

Other recent developments have seen inservice training in areas of multiple intelligences and different learning styles.

To give further support to teachers a recognised ‘good’ teacher has been employed to work as a full time facilitator carrying out research based instruction within the school. She provides on site professional development, working alongside teachers in the classroom. She is able to offer support, model appropriate teaching strategies and assist teachers as they seek to put into practice that which has been learned within the professional development programmes.

Structures are also in place for peer mentoring and peer coaching providing additional support.

Senior staff is charged with the responsibility of seeing that teachers they work alongside maintain a balance in their lives. With the commitment expected it is possible for teachers to become “workaholics.” The school recognised this could become a problem and has strategies in place to identify areas of concern before specific difficulties became a major problem.

Dr Conti said:

“At times it will be necessary to say, ‘Thank you for caring about our students. I think it is now time for you to care about yourself and your family. I know it is tough but don’t get burned out. Let me show you the way. I can show you how to manage your time so that it is achievable. I can show you how to get those papers graded without cheating the kids.’ ”

In order to monitor progress made toward achieving the school’s vision a teacher appraisal programme has been introduced. This has now become an important part of the school’s annual improvement planning with classroom visits scheduled three times a year. Pre appraisal and post appraisal debriefing sessions form part of this process.

Following the third appraisal visit of the year a summative statement is written up which includes information on knowledge, instruction, classroom management, and student assessment. Teachers are required to record a statement illustrating how they know they are making a difference for students. They are expected to provide evidence that shows they have moved students forward during the school year.

Teachers are also required in alternate years to videotape a lesson that is later gone through with their appraiser. This is done to assist each teacher evaluate their own teaching practice and to see where improvements could be made.

Initially many teachers found these strategies rather threatening with the feeling that ‘big brother’ was watching. Now most see it as an acceptable part of the job and a positive way to look at improvement in their teaching. Accountability is an accepted part of the job.

Students at Woodlands Middle School are fortunate indeed to be learning in such a new and well-resourced environment. They have every opportunity to benefit from the latest technology on offer. What was most noticeable however was the philosophy and vision driving the school. The new building was seen purely as a means to an end. Facilities provided were there purely to support student learning outcomes.

“Developing a Vision for Learning in the 21st Century.”

Discussion

A key outcome sought from this ASB/APPA Travelling Fellowship was an exploration of the relationship between *vision* and *leadership*, to see whether the proposition, that successful schools use a *catalyst* to help implement their *vision*, was in fact evident. My contention was that skilled leaders use some form of *catalyst* to initiate and focus change. The development of a shared vision on its own will not lead to school improvement without some means of transforming that vision into action.

It was evident through discussions held with school leaders that the changes described in this report were not all implemented easily. Many difficulties were encountered with obstacles frequently being in the way of developments sought. Initial negativity to proposed change was a common reaction. Generally resistance was evident from a significant number of staff members.

In seeking to overcome these difficulties it would appear leaders in successful schools use several strategies designed to translate vision into action.

1 Successful school leaders ensure strong support structures are in place.

At Bredbyskolan teachers were initially reluctant to make the changes desired. They were comfortable working in relative isolation with responsibility for their own programmes and for students attending their classes. They could see little value in working with students or alongside colleagues from across the school. Changes suggested, with a thematic approach in a cross-curricula manner, were considered to be very radical indeed!

In an effort to overcome resistance, and to help with the development of a shared vision across the school, students familiar with the new practices

were asked to assist. They spent time in other rooms helping both students and teachers alike. They were able to model the new procedures and work alongside students helping them gain an understanding of what was required. The few staff members who had tried working as a team in a thematic way the previous year were fully supportive and were able to offer their help and share their experiences. They were encouraged to meet with colleagues and assist with both planning and implementation. Issues could be addressed as they arose.

Similarly, at Clear Creek School, a strong level of support was offered to help staff understand the changes sought. An outside facilitator was employed to work alongside teachers in classrooms. He assisted both with the planning and the implementation of the new “micronomics” programme ensuring goals set were implemented in a manner consistent with the school’s vision. In working alongside teachers he was able to provide maximum assistance where it was most needed. He was in a strong position to help implement change within every classroom.

Thomas Guskey, (Guskey 1986) proposed that for real change to occur in the classroom practice of teachers then first a change in their beliefs and attitudes is needed. He stated teachers in general tend to teach according to previous experience. They believe they have been successful in the past and so are unwilling to modify their teaching approach until it can be demonstrated change will lead to improved outcomes for students.

Guskey would see three major stages in achieving change within the classroom.

- 1 Provide a facilitator or other appropriate support structures to ensure changes are implemented as desired.
- 2 As a result of these supported changes teachers will see positive results in learning outcomes for students.
- 3 Once teachers see the benefits of the changes for students they will change their attitudes and beliefs.

At this stage the change becomes locked into place with teachers supporting the new developments.

It is the order of focus Guskey saw as important for enduring change. Real change will only occur once teachers understand improved learning outcomes for students will result from the changes being implemented.

It is unrealistic for school leaders to expect major shifts in teaching practice without the provision of appropriate support and guidance. School leaders must accept responsibility for the provision of this support. “Mandating” change may have short-term effects but real change can only be achieved where teachers accept the benefits changes will bring and modify their practice accordingly. Real change occurs when it becomes an acceptable part of school culture. It simply becomes the way things are regularly done rather than being seen as something special.

2 Successful school leaders keep the end goals in sight.

Successful school leaders are “*firm and purposeful.*” (Mortimore et al 1995). They are proactive in initiating change ensuring all that happens within the school leads ultimately towards the successful implementation of the goals set. A vision that cannot be implemented is of little value. It is the school leader’s responsibility to translate the *vision* into *action*. Support from school leadership means providing assistance to overcome difficulties identified, rather than seeing problems as reasons for maintaining the status quo. Once changes sought have been identified the expectation is that they will be actioned. The end goals must always be kept in sight.

Where teachers are not prepared to adapt to changes sought, even though appropriate support may have been given, an inevitable shift out of the school by some staff members is a common outcome. This is frequently the case following the appointment of a new principal or following the implementation of major change within a school. Some teachers

determine they would rather work elsewhere than be part of the new directions.

NC Primary, the *failing* school in Kent, was when visited at the stage where several teachers were deciding that perhaps it was time for them to move elsewhere. They had become very comfortable, and perhaps some even complacent, under the previous Principal. In the short time the new Principal had been at the school it was obvious change was inevitable. Teachers had to determine whether they had the desire, or even the ability, to adapt to the new requirements. A damning report from OFSTED provided strong evidence that significant changes would need to be implemented.

In later discussions with Simon Webb, the current Principal at NC Primary, he stated that a number of teachers had already left the school. Several approaching retirement decided it was time for them to give teaching away. Others had sought and gained positions elsewhere.

Simon Webb recognised these vacancies provided the school with a unique opportunity. Replacement teachers could be appointed who were willing to meet the new challenges being set. Applicants for the positions could be fully informed as to responsibilities and expectations with an understanding they would support these once appointed.

As Dr Dennis Conti, District Superintendent for the Woodlands School District stated, the greatest challenge for school leaders is the appointment of the best teachers. No longer could it be considered appropriate to employ staff



wishing to teach in a manner which was acceptable 10-15 years ago simply because they had the most experience. Teachers must understand professional development and an ongoing commitment to upskilling is now essential if they are going to be effective. Dr Conti emphasised that

teachers must not become *cookie-cutters*. They must put in place programmes to recognise the individual differences students have and be prepared to cater for these differing needs. Where teachers are not able to adapt they may be better working at other schools that better suit their teaching styles.

Hjulsta Skolor exemplified the importance of the principal’s leadership in developing a successful school through steady yet constant progress towards the end goals desired. Elisabeth Sörhuus demonstrated unity of purpose and firm leadership. She realised refugee students attending her school could not possibly make satisfactory academic progress unless more basic human needs were first met. A safe and secure environment along with a growing sense of self worth, were the goals. Once these were established students would begin to feel good about themselves and realise they had much to offer. No longer need they be fearful.

Ms Sörhuus was innovative in finding creative ways to develop student strengths. She recognised the international languages of music and the arts and used these strengths to encourage communication amongst her students. She took every opportunity to show the worth of each student.

Ms Sörhuus was a very visionary leader. She was able to maintain the school’s focus and put in place programmes to best meet student needs. Many obstacles were faced along the way. These obstacles were seen as challenges rather than barriers. Where a problem was encountered Ms Sörhuus would not admit defeat but instead found unique ways to solve seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Her leadership and the way in which she accepted the students was an example for others working at the school to follow. She was able to overcome each difficulty faced and keep a constant focus on the end goals desired.

Here was a very visionary principal and a rather unique school.

3 Successful school leaders put in place structures to turn vision into reality.

In visiting schools it was of particular interest to note the way several school principals expressed a desire to have a more unified school with teachers working in a more collaborative manner. They expressed concern at the number of teachers working in isolation, seeing their role as simply to cater for the students attending their lessons. These principals sought to create a common focus and direction for their school with an environment where teachers discussed and debated educational issues freely. The needs of the students should be the focus rather than what was often the case, the needs of the teachers or the subject matter.

This concern was expressed at Clear Creek and again at Bredbyskolan. In both schools leaders decided some unifying structure was needed to draw staff together. They set about determining what that structure would be. Clear Creek chose *micronomics* and Bredbyskolan decided on a *thematic approach*. These approaches would drive the change process in their respective schools. Teachers would of necessity be forced to discuss the changes being implemented, as these changes would have a significant impact on them personally. Inevitably they would need to engage in discussion and debate. Some degree of conflict would be the likely result.

Conflict was not to be seen as a negative factor. In fact conflict was seen as healthy and positive. It is not conflict itself that has a negative effect on a school but rather the manner in which conflict is managed. Where conflict is encouraged in a supportive, secure environment, healthy debate can result, with a clear direction and unity of purpose the outcome.

Structures chosen by Clear Creek and Bredbyskolan are the *catalysts* to which I have earlier referred. They provided the spark, and the focus, for the implementation of change. They allowed the *vision* to be communicated in a practical way. They assisted others interpret and implement the *vision*.

This concept of a *catalyst* was evident elsewhere. Beaupré clearly set itself up to be a community school. Being located in a small, relatively isolated rural area, it was considered essential for the community to understand there was no need for their children to miss out on opportunities available to those living in other communities. Their own school could fill the gap.



Structures were put in place to ensure all students had opportunities to explore and develop links with communities elsewhere. Students were able to see themselves as individuals in both the wider national and international communities. A strongly developed vision based on the premise, *It takes a whole village to raise a child*, ensured all staff members were well aware of the philosophy and were able to work towards its implementation. A commitment from the principal, along with strong leadership and personal involvement ensured the vision was translated into reality.

The community school concept provided the *catalyst* that enabled staff, students and the wider community to come together with a clearer understanding as to the school’s focus and future direction. The *vision* was now translated into a format that could be more easily understood.

Kobi Nazrul was another school exhibiting strong leadership. The words; *“I cannot stand being in a low achieving school.”* from Principal Ruth Miskin showed the commitment evident. Reading was seen as the key to success for these students. Ms Miskin had put in place a phonics driven programme all staff members were required to follow. The phonics

programme was the *catalyst* used to drive the vision. The implementation of this programme was non-negotiable. Support was offered with Ms Miskin regularly modelling procedures within classrooms.

Two-Mile Ash Middle School was a delight to visit. It had a very warm feeling from the time of entry. There was an air of family and contentment from staff and students alike. I believe here the *catalyst* would have been the “*TMA Creed*.” This had been developed collaboratively with staff and students all having input. The “*Creed*” was in evidence throughout the school. Students certainly knew it well. They could refer to it and clearly articulate the meaning of individual sections.

The “*Creed*” enabled Principal Jim Hudson to develop the school for the benefit of the students. They were obviously the focus for all that happened. The “*Creed*” provided a structure and gave clear directions and a strong message to all who worked at TMA. The message was clear that this school existed for the benefit of students attending.

Jim Hudson acknowledged it took some time for the changes to be implemented. Much discussion with staff, students and parents took place before the vision became clear. Considerable effort was put in to ensuring this was communicated to all so that everyone had a clear understanding as to what TMA stood for. Once it was developed all were expected to support its implementation. No compromises could be allowed.

What was interesting to note was that the students’ suggestion box, which was used quite extensively when changes were first being implemented, is now seldom used. Students have a different forum where issues and concerns can be raised. They obviously now feel someone is listening to them.

Students have a great sense of justice and fair play. It is important they are not only listened to but that they are also heard. Unfortunately this basic human right is not always evident in all schools.

Woodlands Middle school has attempted to meet changes required for the 21st century through the structure and design of its new building. It was well recognised the building on its own would do little for students. The building provides the structure, but it is the teachers who are the school’s greatest resource. It is the teachers who must use the facilities provided to ensure maximum benefit is gained from the building design. The building has become the *catalyst* for the implementation of change. The new structures have provided the impetus for change to occur. They have provided the stimulus for debate and discussion as to how best the needs of students could be catered for within the flexibility the new facilities offer.

Finally a comment on the Kent School District’s Intranet. This particular case study was included as it shows what can be achieved when a group of schools combine for their collective good. It is recognised this district receives financial support that has made the implementation of their vision easier than would be the case in New Zealand with our self-managing structures and individual nature. There seems no impediment however for a group of schools here to combine resources and develop a similar structure.

The Intranet has become a *catalyst* ensuring all teachers working within the district address computer technology issues. No longer can they be ignored as so much information required can only be accessed through the Intranet. It has become a focus for staff, students and community members alike. The Intranet is driving not only technological developments but also school improvement with individual teachers encouraged to provide material to put on the Intranet for the benefit of others. A strong district network supports each teacher who in turn gains individual benefits from the collective approach.

It is interesting to note that each of the ten schools selected for inclusion in this report has adopted a totally different approach towards school improvement. Each has set about instigating change in a way considered best for its own circumstances.

It would appear “*successful*” school leaders are not only able to develop a vision for their school, but are also able to put in place structures that ensure the vision is translated into action. It would seem that the nature of the structure used is not an issue. What is important is that there is a structure to transform vision into action.

The structure, or as I have called it, the *catalyst*, provides a pathway for the process to occur. The *catalyst* provides a model for teachers to follow, ensuring all work in a common manner towards the goals sought.

The *catalyst* provides a forum for discussion and debate. It draws staff together through a common theme with challenges to proposed change focused around specific issues rather than around generalities. It ensures teachers work in a more unified manner through the common issues and problems that will inevitably arise.

In developing a vision for learning in the 21st century *successful* school leaders will not only need to work to develop a shared vision, but they will also require a clear and focussed means for its successful implementation.



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