

FOCUS

The likely impact of proposed curriculum changes on Grey Lynn School's future

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Sabbatical Report Term 1 2006

Introduction

I consider it a privilege to be granted sabbatical leave for Term 1 2006 and would like thank the organizations and individuals who made this possible - notably the Ministry of Education, New Zealand Educational Institute and the New Zealand Principals Federation.

Executive Summary

This sabbatical gave me the opportunity to research the likely impact of proposed curriculum changes on Grey Lynn School's future and to reflect on my time at this School - to analysis my successes, disappointments and current thoughts.

The draft Curriculum Document was released by the Ministry of Education for comment in 2006. Proposed changes will impact on schools current practice. Perhaps most significantly is the requirement to consult with the school community in both curriculum content and context for study. Add this to the already established strategic direction, planning and reporting consultation requirements and a number of questions arise:

- Where are the resources to ensure consultation is done in a meaningful way?
- Will this wider consultation make a difference to programming and ultimately learning outcomes for children?
- Is there a risk that this process will undermine our professional autonomy?
- How will these requirements impact on teacher selection? Recruiting staff that are able to assimilate a wide variety of ideas provided by stakeholders, develop an integrated, innovative, inclusive, purposeful and motivating program that meets Ministry requirements, excites children and meets their individual learning needs will be a significant task. In addition the Ministry now comments on any absence of Government initiatives in school planning and reporting feedback. Consultation, planning and delivering such initiatives places stronger emphasis on the concept of schools being a "learning organization". It also necessitates internal demands that necessitate ones own internal professional development process.

The challenge for many principals and for Grey Lynn School will be in creating release time to allow such developments to occur. It is not foreseen that the current

CRT already allocated will be sufficient. Principals will need to ensure that they are skilled in the process of facilitation and clear on what community consultation needs to be undertaken as we implement the new document. Building community trust will need to be an ongoing goal. “Principals will need to become experts in relationship management in order to be open and honest, avoiding the defensiveness that we all too easily fall into.” (1)

As the school addresses changes inherent in the draft document there will be a need to ensure that positive relationships are maintained with all stakeholders. No wonder the draft document places huge emphasis on developing children’s emotional intelligences!

I am concerned that with the current fiscal and time constraints we face, that the objectives will be lost in demands of the process. It is my hope that the new curriculum will be well supported with documentation such as that available for the First Steps Program. Schools would clearly benefit from the provision of resources to guide the implementation process and provide examples of endpoint detail. From this understanding practical, creative and innovative initiatives will emerge more confidently. Only then will community responsive curriculum change be reflected in the classroom in a meaningful way.

Purpose

The purpose of the sabbatical was to undertake professional refreshment, recharge my batteries and become better acquainted with the new Curriculum. I wanted to review the purpose and direction of the current draft curriculum and the likely impact that the draft will have on principals. I also wanted to compare what we are currently achieving at Grey Lynn and consider what we will need to do to ready the school for the proposed changes. In order to achieve this, and taking advantage of this time, I wanted to view other schools and talk to principals about the directions they were taking in preparation for the curriculum roll out in 2007. Lastly I undertook a literature review on school change.

Background

The New Zealand curriculum is under review through the New Zealand Curriculum Marautanga Project as the Government keeps its promise to evaluate the curriculum developments of the 90s.

The 2006 draft curriculum is mostly derived from the Curriculum Stocktake Report (September 2002) however in its development researchers also sought international opinion as to what skills will be required for the work force in the 21st Century. In addition to the recognized required skill base, changes acknowledge that employees require a well developed emotional intelligence. This is reflected in the new key competencies in the draft curriculum document.

Following a period of consultation where teachers expressed concerns around matters affecting student learning, the cramped nature of the curriculum and difficulties in

providing a balanced curriculum the Stocktake Report made the following 11 recommendations:

- *Essential learning areas are reviewed and refined and outcomes are clarified.*
- *The essential skills, attitudes, and values are revised and better integrated into the essential learning areas.*
- *More opportunities are provided for students to learn another language in years 7-10.*
- *There is a focus on supporting quality teaching and strengthening school ownership of curriculum.*
- *That material be made available so parents and communities know what students are learning at school and why.*
- *Curriculum materials are developed to assist teachers to better meet the needs of diverse students.*
- *The links between outcomes, pedagogy, and assessment are more explicit in curriculum materials and professional development programs.*

In order to address these recommendations the New Zealand Government set up The New Zealand Curriculum Marautanga Project with the specific aims of:

- Clarifying and refining curriculum outcomes
- Focusing on effective teaching
- Strengthening school ownership of curriculum
- Supporting and strengthening communication and partnerships between schools, parents and their communities

The Document

Methodology

Three approaches were undertaken to answer the research questions -

Interviews with three Auckland Principals,

Review of the Ministry of Education's Curriculum website - TKI,

Research – Ministry Web or change management documentation.

Findings

The essence of the Draft Curriculum Document

Following a consultation and review process the draft curriculum will become a single document with achievement objectives reduced by roughly 50%. Added is a compulsory language component for all students from year 7 onwards.

The document redefines the “essential skills” as “key competencies”, with a strong bias towards personal skills and effective communication. It states, for the first time, that all teachers are “teachers of literacy”. The draft promotes a “preferred pedagogy” for creating the best conditions for effective learning. There is a strong bias towards integration of subjects together with Formative Assessment Practices.

The overall aim is to give students clear purpose and direction in their learning within a context achieved through consultation with the school community, students and teachers.

In turn this new curriculum will further raise student achievement.

An interactive website has been established by the Ministry of Education to ensure feedback on the development of the new draft. The site provides a platform for all stakeholders to be part of an ongoing discussion on future changes.

The Draft Curriculum is to be released in June 2006. For each learning area - purpose, principals, values, competencies, essence statements and achievement objectives are outlined. It is expected that the document will be in its final form in 2007.

The Ministry of Education's TKI web site (Te Kete Ipurangi - The Online Learning Centre, Communities, New Zealand Curriculum Project.) is comprehensive and should be used as a reference to support this report.

The new curriculum document uncannily reminds me of my teaching days in the 80s. Education in the 80s adopted a thematic approach to teaching and learning, Elwin Richardson's approach to the "teachable moment", his philosophy of using "prior knowledge" as the motivation factor and "building blocks for scaffolding children's learning" are still relevant today. I vividly remember the Arney Rd Units from Richmond Rd School. These units provided an integrated language approach using school journals as the resource. These integrated language units you could pick up and run with and adapt to the learning needs of your children. This was a guided yet apparently more flexible approach than what confronted us in the 90's. The 90s, with its "outcome based approach" and drive to teach to objectives, as stated in the then new curriculum documents, saw teachers driven to ensure that all objectives were covered regardless of depth of learning. The teachable moment became unfashionable and we adopted a more "assessment driven" curriculum. For many teachers these changes resulted in the loss of a more creative and innovative approach to programming.

The new document seems to marry the two approaches outlined above. It recognizes the positive aspects of curriculum philosophies from the 80s and 90s. It focuses on the needs of the child and is asking teachers to adopt an integrative approach to learning based on formative assessment practices. Assessment is more child centered, allowing for the adoption of personal goals. Children are encouraged to take a more active role in monitoring their own progress. The document requires teachers to be facilitators of learning and be more creative and collaborative in the learning process. Consultation with parents and community is encouraged.

The inclusion of community in curriculum development may see "engaged parents" having a positive benefit on their children's learning. Exploring such relationships in his article (1) titled "Leadership and Building Community relationships." Fullan comments.....

When parents, the community, the teachers, and the students share a rapport, learning occurs. The problem is what to do when such a rapport does not exist. In Patrick Dolan's

words, school people have to involve parents in as many activities as possible and "work through the discomfort of each other's presence." Effective schools use their internal collaborative strength to seek out relationships with the community. They see parents more as part of the solution than as part of the problem. They pursue programs and activities that are based on two-way capacity building in order to mobilize the resources of both the community and the school in the service of learning.(1)

Good schools have been doing this for some time.

What are we currently doing at Grey Lynn School that supports the aims of the Curriculum draft document?

- Consultation with the school community over curriculum content occurs through the self-review process held in September of each year. Parents, Teachers, Children and the Board are consulted on the curriculum content for the following year. The information is compiled by staff and an overriding theme developed. Parents are informed at the beginning of each year. To date the feedback on this process has been excellent. Parents welcome the discussions. Interaction is managed so the process is open and frank. Parents with more than one child at the school enjoy the common theme and this promotes greater interactive learning opportunities within the family.
- The Integrative approach to whole school curriculum development has promoted the development of a collaborative learning culture. All teachers feel that they can contribute to the professional dialogue and direction of the school. All children are seen as the responsibility of all teachers whether they are teachers in the Junior or senior school. This is the essence of a learning organization - a development I believe is inherent in the new curriculum.
- Formative Assessment Practices are promoted and used for feedback and forward planning. Children enjoy the "ownership" of their learning, understand learning intentions and can self assess against the success criteria created by the class.
- We are adopting a culture where data collection and analysis in literacy and numeracy is important and outcomes change behavior. The planning and reporting requirements have forced us to target specific groups of children through the analysis of whole school data. This approach has had a positive impact on both relationships and learning outcomes in this group. There is clear purpose and that purpose is understood.

What does Grey Lynn School need to do to further enhance the adoption of ideas found in the curriculum draft document?

- We need to revisit the schools Vision ensuring the essence of the new curriculum is well integrated into future developments. There is a need to define "our community" so the scope of all consultation is both inclusive and relevant. The "essence" of community needs to be further defined.
- As a staff and community we need to specifically address how we will meet the "Key competencies" of the new curriculum.

- Curriculum leaders need to be acquainted with the Mautarangi web site.
- The school needs to review recruitment criteria for appointment. Are there additional skill areas required over and above those currently adopted?
- Shared leadership needs to be further developed. We must further empower curriculum leaders to take a greater responsibility in their curriculum areas. Sustainability through leadership development still remains the key for our school. Presently leadership development is mainly provided through modeling and the process of osmosis. We now need to strategically plan for this development by looking closely at the skills we require our leaders to have.
- As teachers we are good at giving feedback to children. However further professional development will be required for staff to ensure feedback from the community is received in a positive manner.
- Past experiences need to be discussed and research presented so that forward planning is relevant and follows best practice.
- The major deficit of all recent curriculum developments is the lack of resources required to support good teaching and learning practices during periods of change. Our school needs to seek quality resources that are S.M.A.R.T.

Implications

- Consultation with the community, as recommended by the draft document, will require principals to become more skilled in facilitation. Skill is required to empower the community, provide balanced reporting and implement suggested changes. Some principals will be challenged in this process and will seek additional support.
- Principals will need to be creative and innovative with the information collected from stakeholders. This process will require feedback and feed forward messages. We will need to be good listeners to sustain an information rich inclusive school culture.
- In balance Principals will need to continue to consider the “make up” of their staff. Creative schools will need creative staff who able to employ innovative ideas.
- Principals have always been required to meet the demands of their community. The proposed changes formalize these relationships.
- At present there are few resources for teachers that support the proposed curriculum. In an effort to address this Grey Lynn School is reviewing the First Steps programming.

Conclusion

- The draft implies a more consultative relationship in developing curriculum between schools and their community.
- The draft document will require a shift in thinking and require principals to be well skilled in the art of facilitation.

- Teachers will need to be creative and innovative in assimilation of information for programme design.
- Currently schools provide “schemes of work” to guide teachers in what is to be taught and learnt. Often these schemes do not change from year to year as they tend to be skill based. The new curriculum, in being more local in its origin, will not be supported necessarily by such recourses. How will this need be addressed? Integrated units take time to compile in order to be empowering, purposeful and challenging. A national, regional and local perspective on the provision of support materials is appropriate.
- As schools become more action researched based, Teachers will need to be more skilled in asking the right questions and more knowledgeable with assessment practices and data manipulation.
- Schools will need to develop a more strategic approach with clear vision and values. A comprehensive annual management plan will be required to keep all parties focused on the goals of the organization. This ensures that the direction is clearly stated and intention protected in a given year.
- Most importantly Principals and Boards will need to find more resources or restructure current allocations to give teachers time to think creatively and design innovative and successful programs responsive to the collected data from stake holders.

References

1. Fullan, M. (2000 April), The Three Stories of Education Reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 81 (8) 581-584.
2. Ministry of Education. (2003) The complexity of community and family influences on children’s achievement in New Zealand: Best evidence synthesis. Ministry of Education: Wellington.
3. www.tki.org.nz/r/nzcurriculum
4. W. Patrick Dolan, *Restructuring Our Schools* (Kansas City, Mo.: Systems & Organization, 1994), p. 60.