

Leading Learning within the Primary School by developing an effective review process for learning across the school community.

We want all stakeholders within in our education system to experience effective teaching and achieve their potential. This will happen when effective review practices are implemented and used by school leaders who set appropriately high expectations for all and also judge their success by the academic and social outcomes of all within the wider school community. School leaders lead the learning culture within their schools by introducing systems to ensure this is happening. A lot of effort has gone into developing models to review student progress, why not use one model across the whole school community as a way of reviewing performance, identifying next steps and identifying what learning has take place for all members of the school community.

Evidence-based practices are now applied by governments, principals, teachers, boards of trustees, teacher educators, and researchers, who then base their thinking and actions on credible information, monitor the impact of their actions on student achievement, and adjust their actions accordingly.

We are entering a time where learning should develop independent critical thinking and collaborative problem solving. The New Zealand Curriculum document identifies the need for teachers to use a Teaching as Inquiry approach when working with the students, this model can also be used by school leaders as they work with their school community to develop their learning.

Stringer(1999) suggests following phases when using an action research based process.:

Look - building a picture and gathering information. When evaluating we define and describe the problem to be investigated and the context in which it is set. We also describe what all the participants (educators, group members, managers etc.) have been doing.

Think – interpreting and explaining. When evaluating we analyse and interpret the situation. We reflect on what participants have been doing. We look at areas of success and any deficiencies, issues or problems.

Act – resolving issues and problems. In evaluation we judge the worth, effectiveness, appropriateness, and outcomes of those activities. We act to formulate solutions to any problems. (Stringer 1999 pg.160)

There is a need for collective responsibility among all sectors of the ‘learning community’. Lambert (2002) states that; “tomorrow, we may view all participants in the education arena, including community members and policy makers as instructional co-leaders” (Lambert, 2002, p. 40).

Teachers are already picking up new skills, habits, and protocols of literacy and creating new social spaces as they are introduced to new technologies. Teachers and students should be helped to understand and learn ethical standards that shape their practices as participants in networked cultures. They must be able to articulate their understanding of how media shapes perceptions of the world. To meet these challenges, certain conditions have to evolve.

The challenge that precedes that is how educators can be supported to approach new contexts and cultures in a way that does not add extra pressure to an already challenging and under-resourced job. One context is to use a review process to inform learning that has occurred, the level at which it has occurred and what needs to be done to improve in the future.

While self review can be motivating and engage participants in learning more effectively, its sustained impact depends on the ability of the participant to integrate or embed the outcomes into the learning experience of others in such a way that the potential of learning is fully realised. Teachers have to be confident in their own capacity and understand the potential benefits of using assessment in a planned and pedagogically sound way.

Much of this development depends on teachers being motivated to take the initiative and extend their use of assessment with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the learning opportunities they provide. (Condie & Munro 2007. Pg 63)

Schools face ever-stronger calls for accountability. In our school system there does need to be an increasing engagement with teacher professional learning that leads to improvement of student outcomes. This can only happen when all schools implement effective cycles of self review and assess their performance in a similar way as student performance is reviewed and reported on.

A successful review process consists of thoughtful questioning, careful listening and reflective responses' to clarify prior learning, exploring current mis/understandings to guide future improvements.

All involved need to believe that improvements in their learning are more likely to occur through their efforts than through their ability.

School leaders need to define and share the learning objective and then offer and use feedback to close identified gaps. Teachers will identify desired outcomes, actions needed to close the gaps identified and list the necessary support required. As those involved assume more focussed responsibilities for assessing themselves, they will have an interest in developing a more realistic sense of the quality required.

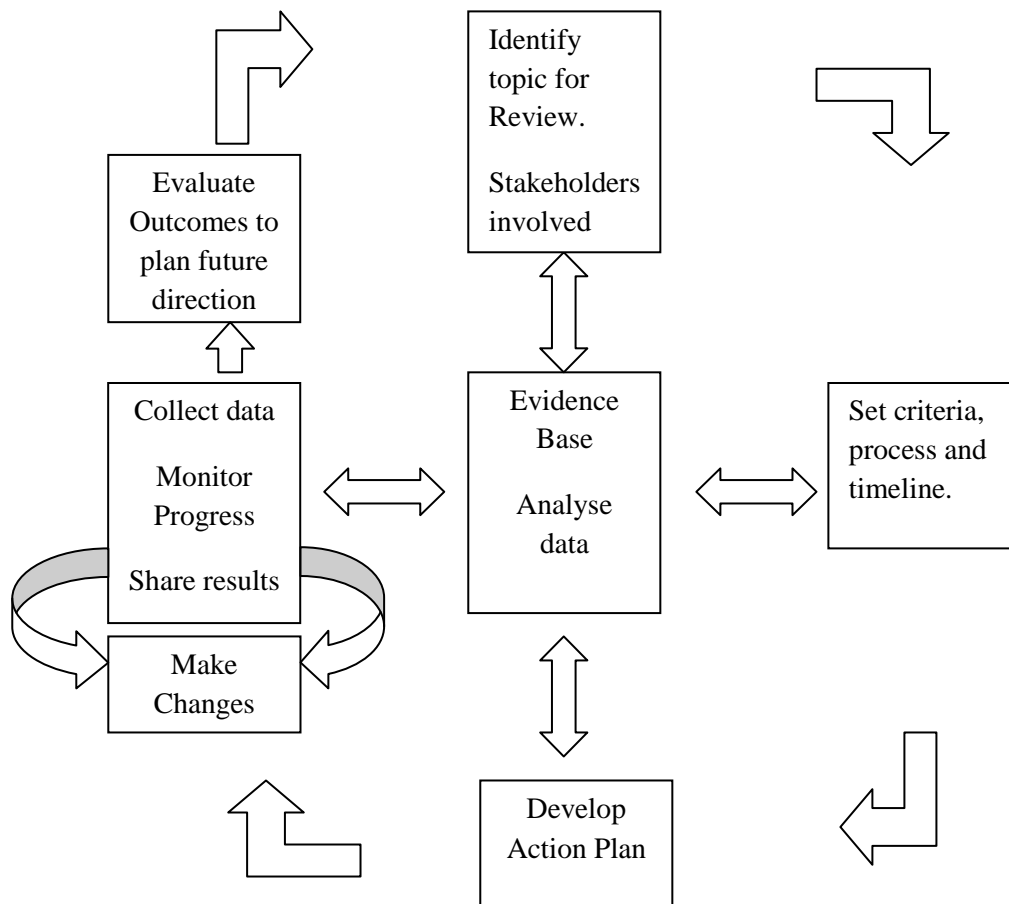
A process such as this will inform and support personal learning planning, standard sharing and an improved understanding of both the principles and practice of assessment for learning will develop which will flow on to classroom practice.

This approach will give opportunity for critical reflection within school leadership teams and whole staff forums to identify the strategies needed in order to lift the quality of professional performance and student achievement. Collins (2006) suggests the link between what teachers do and what learning outcomes result for students will become evident as the process is worked through.

To Develop the School as a Successful Learning Community I am suggesting the introduction of a Five Stage Cycle of School Review to identify:

1. How well are we doing?
2. How do we compare with similar schools?
3. What more should we achieve this year?
4. What must we do to make it happen?
5. Taking action and monitoring progress.

As usual a S.M.A.R.T Approach is a good one to keep in mind and follow, accordingly the model needs to be: Specific, Measurable (quantitative data as well as qualitative data for analysis), Achievable, Realistic and Time related.



This School Wide review programme can review performance to improve learning, monitor school's effectiveness and plan for the future in a unified way. The information gathered helps to establish learning needs and priorities identify barriers to learning, develop the next learning steps, determine future learning, and provide data that can be used to reporting to the wider school community of all members of the school in a common way.

The first step of the process is to identify and agree on the terms of the review. There needs to be purpose and ownership. Criteria and a timeline are set for the process. At this stage it would also be possible to identify who is going to be involved and their roles clarified as well. An action plan would then be developed and agreed to. This will make sure there is a

structure to the process and the focus area is reviewed in a planned way. Specific questions, types of data to be collected and analysed and other key areas of the review process would be developed at this stage. Regular monitoring of progress would be initiated to make sure the review moves along in a timely manner. It would also be a good time to consider the following: *How do you know if your initiatives are successful? Where are we at? Where do we want to go to? How are we going to get there? What are the possible barriers and developing contingencies to address them?*

Once the data is collected and analysed the next phase will be to deliver a report that identifies the current position, identifies the levels of improvement that has taken place, identifies the next steps to improve on current performance and identifies the changes that might need to be made to current practice.

This is a cyclic model so the data will be useful as a starting point when a review in the same area is initiated in the future because baseline data will be available.

The purpose of this type of review is to improve learning and teaching for student and teachers, to motivate all by providing feedback on their achievements, which leads to those involved recognising their next steps and how to go about taking them. There is provision for monitoring progress against clear learning outcomes.

The proposed school wide review process will:

- Identify where the learner is, where they are going to and how they are going to get there.
- Include shared criteria when appropriate so that the learner knows what they are expected to do.
- Provide a consistent, school wide review system that is manageable and coherent.
- Develop self empowerment so all participants are equipped with strategies to promote direction towards the next learning steps.
- Develop a culture that will support self motivated learning.

Before the review process starts the following points need to be carefully considered by all involved:

- What do we want to know?

- What is the best way to gather the data?
- Why do we want to know it?
- When is the most appropriate time to obtain the information?
- How are we going to use the information?
- Who needs to know?

Once these have been considered the next step is to agree on:

- How the data is going to be recorded.
- How it is going to be presented.
- Who is it going to be presented to
- How is it going to be used to influence future planning

Currently many schools are using Portfolios as a way of showing student progress, identify next steps and provide evidence of work completed. Staff can develop a Reflective Journal to do the same and it can contain information and artefacts that relate to professional development and other achievements that have taken place throughout the year. The Reflective Journal can also include a personal philosophy of education, list the vision and goals for the year. This document can be used to focus teachers into what they are teaching, why they are teaching it and what they hope to achieve. For this to be fully reflective it will need to be added to over time with honest reflection document will be under continuous development.

Reflective Journals could include:

- A personal philosophy – teaching learning
- Changes to the curriculum and curriculum delivery
- Reflection on current practices
- Professional development needs
- Performance agreements and appraisal
- Professional standards and attestation documentation
- Feedback from principal, peers, parents
- Samples of work

Reflective journals can be set up as a 'blog' (a form of e-portfolio) and be added to regularly

Geoff Southworth (2001) draws on research findings, inspection evidence, and first-hand experience to describe four strands that form the thread of leadership and leading 'learning and teaching' in schools.

Southworth (2001) suggests successful school leaders are constantly developing and connecting' the stand he lists as:

- **Context:** "Context matters because leadership is contingent on where you are, who you are, and whom you are working with."
- **Teacher culture:** "One of the links between teacher professional development and a school's capacity to grow and improve is "the existence of a culture that supports strong professional ties between teachers."
- **Workplace learning:** "The greatest opportunities for teachers improving their pedagogy comes by them learning from the colleagues with whom they work every day."
- **Knowledge networks:** "Schools must be adaptive places, learning from outside as well as from persons on the inside ... networks extend professional frames of reference and challenge beliefs, customs, and cherished practices."

School leaders can lead learning by placing more responsibility on individual teachers and the school community when moving towards the goal of 'all children will learn'? Review and Assessment for leading learning is a process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

Creating opportunities for teachers to assess or self review their performance themselves may not sit comfortably with some, however school leaders can use this strategy to encourage teachers take greater responsibility for their personal professional learning to improve teaching opportunities and student achievement.

Some will question why is change needed in the first place and resist any attempts to get them to accept a new way of completing a review. Over the past decade the world has been experiencing exponential change. The industrial economy is in decline and now knowledge is viewed as the new commodity. A result of this is that industrial-age institutions need to evolve to meet the demands of the global market-place. Schools are charged with the responsibility of leading the learning that is going to prepare the future workforce for this.

Learning is identified as a social activity where collaboration achieves more than competition. Learning is more effective in 'real' contexts. Successful learning results in new knowledge, the review model helps develop an awareness of one's real personal learning needs because it is set around the individual rather than the group.

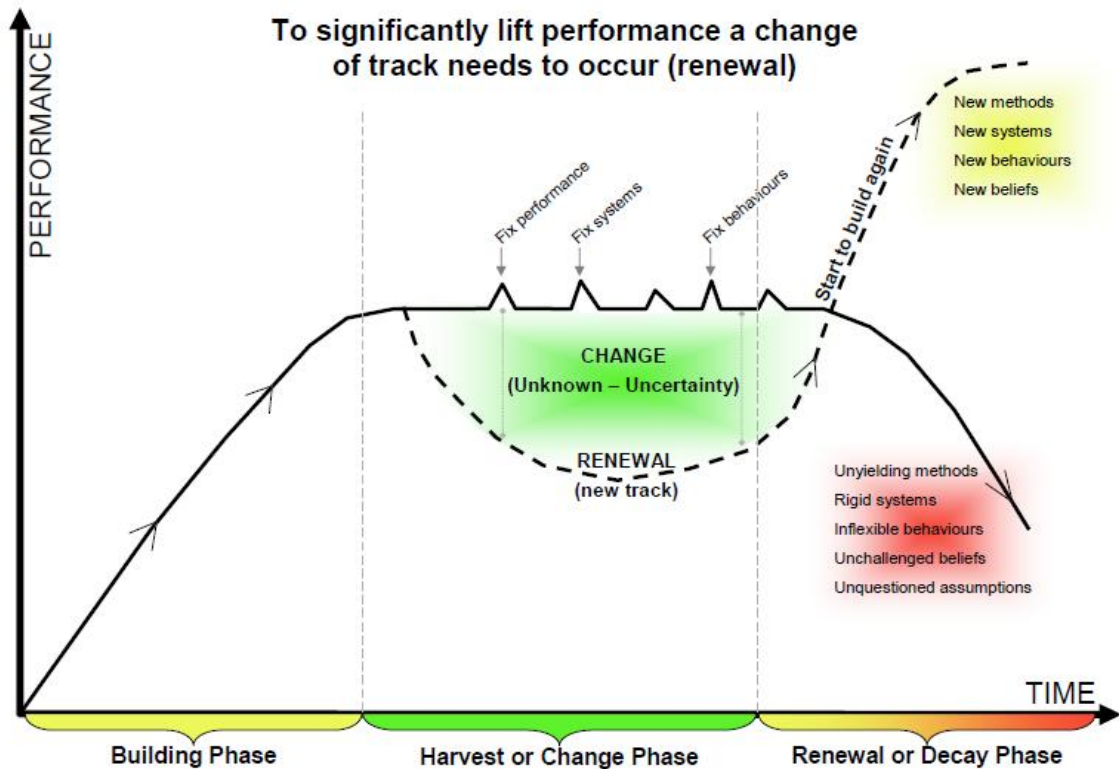
To introduce this model it will be important to manage the change process so that it becomes an opportunity for future growth for those involved with it.

The following steps will need to be followed:

- 1. Sound Preparation:** This includes clarifying what the change is intended to achieve. Establishing clear, measurable and realistic objectives and outcomes. Identifying risks and developing appropriate controls. Choosing incremental over transformational change if time allows. Aiming to introduce change fast enough to give a sense of progress, yet not exceeding people's ability to absorb and control it. Where appropriate, trial changes before full implementation to allow development and modification. Consider what resources and training will be needed to make the change succeed.
- 2. Create a Common Vision:** Helping people understand the need for change and provide a clear vision of what will be accomplished and how people will be affected.
- 3. Clear Communication:** Communicating the vision clearly, and often, to everyone. Establishing processes to allow ongoing communication so that people hear things through official channels, rather than "on the grapevine".
- 4. Address Concerns & Enable Participation:** Developing processes to bring concerns out into the open and discuss them. Participation in the change process can help to develop ownership and commitment and improve its effectiveness—so participant feedback will be built into the change process. Where changes have negative consequences for individuals, providing organisational support and assistance where possible (such as counselling, further training, redeployment, and treatments for any identified occupational health and safety risks). Also ensuring that leaders have the capability to provide effective support to their staff.

5. **Develop a Clear Action Plan:** Involving people in developing clear plans about who will do what, when and how in order to achieve the vision and make the change work.
 - Objective setting
 - Time management
 - Resource planning
 - Performance monitoring
6. **Celebrate Progress:** Celebrating success as stages are achieved to enable people to let go of the old and accept the new. Setting short-term goals and providing a sense of achievement as they are reached. Aiming to create a culture where change is about continuous learning and improvement.
7. **Create a Climate of Certainty:** Telling people what you do know, explaining what will change and what will not. Establishing processes to give individual and team feedback on how the change is progressing, and how their efforts and support are helping. Providing a sense of stability and routine.
8. **Follow Up:** Monitoring how the change is progressing and reviewing the adequacy of risk controls. Establishing what is working well and what needs improving. Modifying in the light of on-going review.

The diagram below showing the Sigmoidal Curve (prepared by Barbara Chapman) shows the progress of change when introduced into an organisation. This is based on Handy's model and was used as part of our Kainui ICT PD Cluster Information and Communication Technology professional development.



(Barbara Chapman - Sterling HR – Palmerston North 2008)

This diagram shows that it is common that there will be a dip in performance as the change creates the state of uncertainty however the final out come of the self review model will be a more creative supportive learning environment that encourages reflective thought and action. The relevance of learning will be enhanced as more opportunities for learning are facilitated. Connections to prior learning will be related developing a inquiry approach to learning and teaching pedagogy. Time will be spent on identifying how learners learn and why leading learning is important within the modern school community.

An efficient review model provides all those involved with the information and feedback they need to make informed judgements, choices and decisions about what has been learned and how well and to use the feedback wisely to plan for future improvement.

The review process will encourages a more coherent approach to assessment across the school. The leading of learning will be reinforced across all levels of the school community. School review will be leading the professional learning within the school by promoting a challenging learning culture. Priorities to reduce competing demands will help ensure focussed opportunities to learn are provided. Distribute leadership be reinforced by

developing teacher leaders with specific areas of focus and engaging appropriate expertise when necessary.

Reluctant participants will be engaged by putting forward compelling reasons to become involved by providing effective professional learning content, backed by relevant effective teaching theories as it is important to know what content and learning activities are likely to be of benefit to meet personal needs across the school community.

A much greater problem than teachers' existing theories of practice is the assumption made by some professional development providers that their preferred practices should be implemented without engaging these theories. Effective teaching is much more than a set of prescribed behaviours; it is an activity that integrates a teachers cognitive structures (knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes) and every aspect of the situation in which they practise. The most effective theories are integrated around the notion of responsiveness to students. This model will encourage teachers to consider their teaching practices and the theories that underpin them, in order to maximise opportunities to learn. School leaders have the responsibility of implementing processes to lead learning across all sectors of the school community, again this model facilitates this.

Evidence of a successful review model will be improvement in performance, reflective approaches to teaching, the development of a community of learners who are all focuses on using the system and associated structures to raise expectations and achievement levels.

A school culture where there is a shared vision about why we are doing this and the acceptance of the 'culture of change' will develop. There will be a clear understanding of what you want to do and how you are going to get there shown by all learners which is lead by school leaders will be evident . This should also result in developing a high level trust environment where colleagues work collaboratively to support the learning of each other.

When reviewing effectiveness of teaching interpreting information is used to identify the next steps to guide development of pedagogical knowledge

There is sure to be some resistance change. Negative aspects of this model would include:

- Lack of knowledge and understanding of current theory and research around effective review and assessment. A contingency for this could be to introduce professional reading and discussion around this topic well before initiating the new model. Make links to the NZ Curriculum document and Best Evidence Synthesis documents
- Lack of time to be involved in Professional Development programmes. Contingency – plan a structure professional development programme to suit the needs of the person and provide time and resources for this to happen within reasonable time slots within the school day. The person would need to be provided with release etc for this to happen but can be factored into the budget.
- Resistance to any change or new way of thinking. Sometimes this will need to be dealt with in a very formal way and become non-negotiable.
- Lack of funding to provide the necessary resources require implementing the new model. Budgeting is very important and needs to be considered carefully at all stages of the process.
- Too much change happening at the same time. People become confused and overloaded and end up by burning out. The change needs to be planned with all contributing factors clearly identified. Involve the stakeholders in the planning process. Listen to the community because when they know what is expected they will know what they are striving towards.

It is important to recognise the potential for resistance during the implementation process. During this stage leaders need to demonstrate an awareness of the need to ‘sell’ the change to the different groups of stakeholders so that it becomes embedded into the culture of the school. When careful consideration is given to planning the change management process there is likely to be a greater sense of responsibility, ownership and buy-in. Using the following questions will help prepare one for resistance before it becomes an issue: *What is the change? Why is it required? How is it going to impact on stakeholders? What resources will be needed? What are the expected outcomes? How will you know when the outcome is achieved? When will it be reviewed and how?*

As a leader of learning it is important to remember all new initiatives need to support the schools vision and lead improved levels of learning. Leading learning impacts on the classroom environment, curriculum, effective teaching, teachers lives by introducing new or revised learning strategies through effective review procedures.

In March 2009 facilitated a Professional Development Day for all of the principals and teachers in the Kainui ICT PD Cluster. She left us with this thought.....

“Effective teaching and learning occur when both my students and I can explain;

- what we are doing,
- how well it is going, and
- what we need to do next”

(Pam Hook) Kainui ICT PD Day – March 2009

While this thought refers to students I believe when in our leading of learning role our teachers are our students

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