

PRINCIPALS  
SABBATICAL REPORT  
Term 2  
2012

Purpose: To investigate a range of methods which schools utilise to effectively communicate and consult with their stakeholders.

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## 1.0 Acknowledgements

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- Joe Cudd, Head teacher of Maes Y Morfa
- Margaret Lever, Head teacher of Chuckery Primary School, Walsall
- David Carne, Business Manager, Walsall Primary School
- Dr Deryk Lever, educationalist and former Inspector of Schools
- Mary McStay, Head teacher, New North Academy
- Thomas Packer, Headmaster, West London Free School
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- Principals and school throughout N.Z
- The Headteachers of Vsgol Community Primary School and Bigun Primary School, Llanelli, Wales

## 2.0 Foreword

From the onset of my sabbatical, it became increasingly clear to me that my whole approach to this topic was rather too narrow and somewhat naïve.

While I still wished to identify best practice with regards to consultation, I realised that there was a real confusion of terminology surrounding the topic and that I first needed to clarify this. Secondly, I sought to correlate my definition of stakeholder consultation with an outline of the relevant legislation. Lastly, I examined the possible benefits to children's learning and achievement as a result of effective parental involvement/participation in schools.

Likewise, as a direct result of my sabbatical, I was exposed to a number of international trends, such as the precursor of Charter Schools and, as such, felt that it would be remiss of me not to deal with these as part of my report.

Finally, it had been my intention to focus on how schools may engage the community in curriculum development and review. Unfortunately, I had not realised the absolute sparsity of information pertaining to this aspect. While many schools 'consult', most do not engage parents.

As can be seen, I have already used 4 terms, namely, consultation, involvement, participation and engagement. What does each mean?

**Community Consultation** is generally seen as the act of conferring or the deliberation of two or more parties, with a view to a decision.

**Parent Involvement** tends to be regarded as a partnership between the school and its parent community and the contributions which both can make to the functioning of both. It tends to be directive in that it focusses on the completion of tasks set by the school.

**Parent Engagement** has been described as a process whereby schools are leading with the parents self-interests (needs/wants) in an effort to develop a

genuine partnership. It tends to be a continuous dialogue and a 2 way flow of information and views, to identify needs, determine priorities and agree to actions.

So what is the difference? Larry Feriazo in an Education Week Teacher Blog described it as follows. “When it comes to a breakfast of ham and eggs, the chicken is involved (parent involvement), while the pig is committed” (engagement).

During my sabbatical, I increasingly came to the conclusion that the term involvement could more often than not, simply fulfilling the will of the school, or government mandates. In other words, based on what the school deems to be important. At the worst, it is simply a part of a checklist of completion or, an attempt to gain a parent mandate for what the school is already doing.

As Karen Mapp points out in her research paper, “Having Their Say: Parents Describe why and how they are Engaged in their Children’s Learning”, “...parents may be involved in their children’s education in ways not recognised by schools with a narrow vision of what constitutes legitimate participation. School staff that only recognise as legitimate forms of involvement school directed and sanctioned activities that centre on involvement at schools, such as fundraising, volunteering in classrooms or participating on school leadership teams, may limit the ways that parents can be involved”.(Mapp, p.59)

There is another alternative. Dr Joyce Epstein, Director of the Centre on School, Family and Community Partnerships and National Network of Partnership Schools and research professor of sociology at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, coined the term ‘community partnerships’. This term alleviates some of the obvious deficiencies inherent in the above definitions by recognising that, “parents, educators and others in the community share responsibility for students’ learning and development”. (Epstein, 2009)

During the course of this paper I will utilise this terminology and consider that consultation and engagement and involvement are simply a part of this partnership.

What are the benefits of parent's involvement for improving the children's academic achievement and social outcomes?

Considerable research has been conducted over the years on the benefits, so much so, that I will only limit myself to a small 'slice' of what has been completed.

Professor John Hattie, formerly of Auckland University, calculated the average effect size for the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement to be 0.51, which is bigger than the average effect size for all educational interventions of 0.4.

The Pisa survey of 2011 (of which Cockle Bay School was a part) identified the key role of parental involvement following interviews with the parents of over 5000 students.

Three other major reports including, The Education Review Office in 2008, the New Zealand Council for Economic Research in 2008, and the Ministry of Education in 2003, all concluded that effective partnerships between parents and schools resulted in improved outcomes for children.

The Best Evidence Synthesis of 2009 entitled 'School Leadership and Student Outcomes. Identifying What Works and Why' has some extensive research on the topic which should in theory, assist in making positive changes to our education system. What a shame that much of this work remains shelved and unread because of other 'more pressing needs and commitments', such as National Standards.

In a "New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement", Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp reviewed 51 studies and concluded that these studies found,

"... a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds for students of all ages".

Finally, Dr Joyce Epstein and her team at John Hopkins University have produced a vast array of research evidence over a prolonged period, and backed this up with partnership programmes to facilitate effective implementation.

In summary, benefits could be summarised as follows:

#### For Students

- Higher test scores
- Improved social skills and behaviour
- Improved adaptability and school attendance
- Increased enrolment in higher education programmes

#### For Parents

- More confidence in the school
- Greater confidence in themselves as parents and their ability to help their children learn at home
- Greater likelihood that parents will enrol in continuing education

#### For School and Community

- Improved teacher morale
- Higher ratings of teachers by parents
- More support from families
- Higher student achievement
- Increased school reputation in the community

What does current legislation and the New Zealand Curriculum say?

Considering the emphasis on parental choice and involvement promulgated during the introduction of Tomorrows Schools in 1989, and the considerable research that the Ministry of Education has been involved with or facilitated, the legislation is very light indeed.

Nag 1 (e) simply states, "In consultation with the Maori community, develop and make known to the school community policies, plans and targets for



improving the achievement of Maori students”. In turn, Nag 2 says, “Develop a strategic plan which documents how they (boards) are giving effect to the NEGS through their policies, plans and programmes, including those for curriculum...”

The National Education Goals (NEGS) offer nothing about partnerships, curriculum development or likewise.

The New Zealand Curriculum which was gazetted in 2007 does make several mentions of engagement or partnerships. One of the 8 Principles is termed ‘Community Engagement’ and states, “The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives and engages the support of their families, whanau and communities”.

Under Effective Pedagogy, ‘Creating a Supportive Learning Environment’, the documents states, “They (effective teachers) also build good relationships with the wider school community, working with parents and caregivers as key partners who have unique knowledge of their children and countless opportunities to advance their children’s learning”.

While I am certainly not advocating the idea of further compliance in our system, I do believe that current legislation and curriculum design as pertaining to partnerships, is a little lightweight and is very much open to interpretation. As others have pointed out in my readings, maybe the consultation here simply means ‘telling’ parents what we are doing. I cannot help thinking that the realities between the ethos and actual practice are so predictable. On one hand, we have a Ministry of Education who actively support research, and possibly practice, (e.g. the FACE, Family and Community Engagement in Education) around parent involvement, Principals who I am sure see the real benefits, but both only really pay lip service to the concept because of all of the other demands, including National Standards and Planning and Reporting requirements.

### **3.0 My Sabbatical Trip**

Much of what I saw and experienced in both England and Wales was facilitated by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens and Mike Collins of the National College for School Leadership, and Professor Alma Harris from the Institute of Education at the University of London. To each of them, I am most grateful.

Professor Harris is an extremely influential academic and somewhat of an 'expert' on the engagement of parents in their children's education. As a result of her attendance at a conference in Sydney in 2010, the Principal of Yea High School in Victoria, wrote an article entitled, "Empowering Students. Embracing Families as Partners". Considering the influence she had on this school, it was only logical that I endeavour to contact her and she very kindly directed me to my first school,

#### **3.1 Maes Y Morfa in Llanelli, Wales.**



Morfa as a community could be described as being in an area which is extremely deprived. It has very high unemployment, high migration, high crime rates and many social problems. It is in many ways so typical of parts of Wales whom have lost its industry and therefore employment.

Maes Y Morfa (Mice e Morva) sits in the middle of this district like a shining beacon. It is new, bright and colourful, and welcoming, but most importantly, it is led by an inspirational leader. Joe Cudd is one of those fortunate individuals who is not only blessed with an amazingly open and friendly personality, but has an extensive pedagogical knowledge and excellent leadership skills. He is well recognised not only in his own district, but within the British system and is now attached to the British Council. Of all the Principals that I met during my travels, he is the closest to the New Zealand model. He moves around the school easily, knows all of his pupils names (and needs), and they know him. He has an excellent knowledge of his staff and it is obvious that not only do they respect him, but genuinely like him as well.

As noted, the school itself is the creation of an amalgamation, and thanks to Joe's tenaciousness, no expense seemed to have been spared. Its design is warm and very practical, but in my mind and mind-set, perhaps a little hamstrung by the typically British security systems.

The grounds are well designed, utilise expanses of grass (so untypical of many schools in the U.K) and have some excellent equipment.

I was impressed by the friendliness and focus of the pupils and staff. Time on task was high and obviously both groups enjoyed being there.

The school was extremely high tech, utilising all of the common tools of technology. However, they were regarded as tools, and not as a selling point for the school.

Joe is an innovative Principal and has initiated a highly tuned intervention system which would be envied in our part of the world. (more later)

I was particularly impressed with one whole wing of the school which was devoted to either community involvement or to the Kindergarten part of the

school. It convinced me that schools can make such a difference to their pupils, and in particular, their achievement levels, by being able to incorporate the below 5 year olds into their organisation. By the time the pupils reach school age, they have already been inculcated in the life, the ethos and philosophy of the school. They know the expectations and rules and have already developed many of the self-managing skills which often take up so much time in our new entrant classes. More importantly perhaps, they are already into the 'curriculum groove', having a fundamental understanding of literacy and numeracy, and the 'speak' of learning.

The full incorporation of the community wing into the school is still not complete, being under the control of the local council. However, Joe is well aware of the massive potential full incorporation would bring and has plans to ensure that the one stop shop for education, health and parent/community education becomes a reality.

Joe very kindly arranged visits to two other schools in Llanelli, Vsgol Brynteg Community Primary School and Bigun Primary School. Each was quite different, particularly in design. The former was a new school, while the latter was older and an absolute warren. I thank each of the schools for their warm Welsh welcome and for showing me around.

I very much liked working with Joe and hopefully, we can keep in contact. I wish him all of the best with his doctorate thesis related to learning communities.

### 3.1.2 The New North Academy



This school was recommended by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens for the amazing work that has been completed as part of the Community Cohesion Project.

This was a stunningly designed (perhaps the best I have seen) and extremely well led school nestled in a very low socio-economic part of the Islington Borough. It was formed through the amalgamation of 2 Victorian aged schools, and this, combined with the fact that it was to become an academy, required a very strong, committed and tenacious Headmaster. This they got in Mary McStay.

Before discussing the merits of the school, it may be worth firstly looking at what an Academy actually is, particularly in light of the fact that the model is a pre-cursor to Mr Banks Charter School.

The U.K Department of Education describes academies as being:

Publically funded independent schools which benefit by having greater freedoms, including:

- Freedom from local authority control
- The ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- Freedom around the delivery of the curriculum
- The ability to change the length of terms and school days
- Greater freedom in how they use their budget

While they receive the same per-pupil funding as other schools, they do receive additional to cover the services once provided by the local authority. Some have sponsors and it is these sponsors that are held accountable for improving the performance of the school.

They are slightly different to the Free Schools. Later in this report, I will provide a chart which shows a comparison between our school and the Academy and Free Schools.

New North Academy was the epitome of what can be done when money is no real concern. The English Department of Education obviously wanted a beacon school and that's what they got.

As noted, Mary McStay was a very passionate leader and very much knew exactly what was going on. Her openness and warmth was reflected in the staff who made me feel very welcome.

The pupils were once again focussed, to the extent that they hardly knew that I was there. They were extremely polite, calm and engaged, belying their socio-economic level (65% entitled to free meals and 85% from an immigration background).

The curriculum was a purchased international one, and while not fully designed with the children in mind, appeared to be exciting and engaging the pupils.

The pupils were performing at what would be considered above expectations. When I questioned the Head about this, she stated that achievement levels were based on high expectations of the school by all, rigorous assessment procedures and an overarching philosophy of teamwork and success for all.

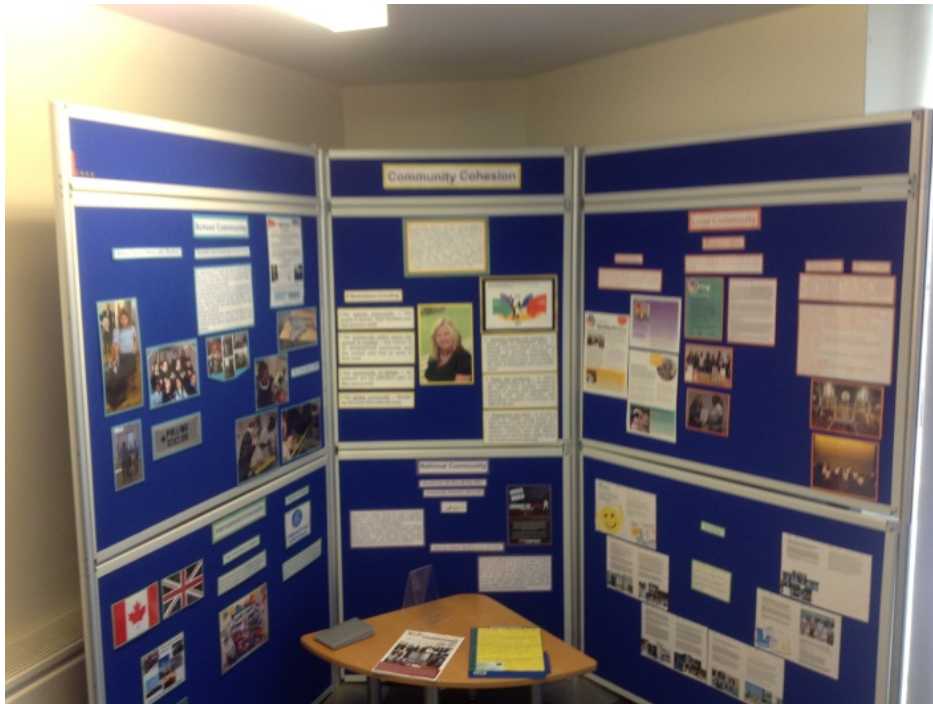
The parent group appeared to be extremely happy and supportive of the school and embraced the concept of community cohesion.

So what is Community Cohesion?

The goal of the programme is stated as,

“Working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of peoples, backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all’ and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community”.

A very grandiose goal, but in many ways necessary in terms of the composition of English society, mass immigration and cultural differences and the constant reminder of flashpoints such as the London riots of 2011.



**Community Cohesion Display in foyer**

New North Academy has genuinely embraced this goal and has developed a specific plan to implement the concept of cohesion. They have appointed a full time co-ordinator who ensures that this plan is followed and modelled to other schools. Because all of the details can be found on their web-site, [www.newnorthacademy.com](http://www.newnorthacademy.com), I will only elude to one aspect, namely 'The New North Key for Parents'.

The New North Key for Parents is a series of workshops designed to invite parents from the community to work alongside local health, education and social care professionals to discuss ideas on a range of topics devised by parents. Primarily, these are topics which were important to new parents (pre-school children/babies), such as, sleeping, feeding, communication, behaviour, and parents own well-being.

At the end of the course, the team produces an information folder packed full of ideas, advice and where to seek help on the topics.

While I am unsure whether the approach would work with the Cockle Bay parents, or that they would choose such topics, what impressed me was that it was run by parents for parents. The school did not second guess parents by



suggesting topics, and the booklets were produced by the parents and in a language that they understood.

Possible ideas that I took away from this school included:

- The New North Key concept or similar
- The need to recognise and actively involve all of the contributing cultures of our school
- An appreciation that parent engagement can take many forms and does need to recognise cultural differences
- Their web-site ideas
- Enviro' Team possibilities-Some of their garden areas were very innovative and made excellent use of space.



**Typically small English School grounds but immaculate**



**Second floor foyer area**

### **3.1.3 West London Free School**



During my stay in London, I was based in Hammersmith which placed me a short distance from one of the newest schools in England, and the absolute prototype of Mr Banks' 'Charter School". The appeal was quite alluring and I was very grateful to be accepted for a visit. What made it even more appealing to me was that someone from our government had recently visited the school in a 'fact finding' mission.

West London Free School was established late 2011 by a Mr Toby Young and a steering group of interested people comprising teachers and parents. As a free school, it must be non-selective, is funded by the taxpayer, and free to attend. It is also able to determine its curriculum and be based on the vision of the 'community. It is still subject to inspection by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) and is accountable to the Secretary of State for Education. Similar to the Academy School? Most definitely, as it grew out of the academies. This will become more obvious when you peruse a latter chart comparing the features of both types with a New Zealand state school.

As per expectations, this school offers a classical liberal education based on a very traditional curriculum, is academically rigorous, and touts strong discipline

and a competitive atmosphere. Latin is compulsory to the age of 14 and music is the school speciality.

The school is presently set up in temporary accommodation and will move into new buildings when funding is available.

The Headmaster, Thomas Packer, was selected from 100 applicants, is excited with leading this new school, and fits the job well. He is fully aware of, and aligned with the vision set up by the organising committee.

It was difficult to form any real opinions to this school, as not only was it very new, but it looked a little temporary in its buildings. All pupils were off site competing sport when I was invited to visit.

Strangely, I had more than a feeling of deja vue as I talked to Thomas as the model appeared to be similar to that envisaged by the Picot Committee prior to the launching of Tomorrows Schools, that is, a school serving its local community and its needs/wants, based on community consultation, and with minimal interference from the government.

Based on what I saw, my conversations with the Headmaster and research, I can see the following positives (some for the government rather than the school) These may include:

- Self-Management
- Allows greater choice for parents, particularly if they are dissatisfied with their local school
- Less governmental and agency restrictions
- Reduction in building costs for the government if being set up as a new school
- The curriculum may well suit the traditionalists and those yearning for a 'private type education'.

And the negatives?

- Will they adequately serve the lower socio-economic areas, in particular, the curriculum?

- Will a reduction be a reality based on the agendas of many western governments and their obsession with targets and data gathering?
- They can be set up by any group, with the application based on relatively loose criteria. Because the 'sponsors' are accountable for the achievement levels, I would be concerned at the possible permanency at the governance level.
- Is there a genuine need? Cannot the same be achieved within the state system?
- There is already a great deal of research into the Charter Schools in the United States which indicate that achievement levels are on the whole, below their traditional counterparts. Stanford University has just released a report which is somewhat scathing of the model. Dr Joyce Epstein works across all types of schools and informed me that there are just as many failing Charter Schools as others.

I genuinely like diversity in education, but in this case, feel somewhat ambivalent about the concept. I am also cynical enough to suggest that it may simply be based on a politicians whim, a 'copycatting' of an idea without adequate research and a desire to leave a personal legacy. In saying this, if for any reason the concept was offered up to mainstream New Zealand (at the moment it is only destined for failing or lower decile schools) the allure of additional monies and less interference would be appealing.

### 3.1.4 Chuckery Primary, Walsall



The National College of School Leadership also directed me to Chuckery Primary; a large primary school situated 10 kilometres north of Birmingham.

They were impressed with the work that the school was doing with their community, which was once again, very deprived

As with the other schools I had seen, Walsall was quite new, although it did retain some buildings from the original school, and stood out amongst the relative drabness of the surrounding buildings and estates.

Headteacher, Mrs Margaret Lever, was once again a strong, passionate, experienced and innovative leader who appeared to be making a real difference to her school. She knew her staff, pupils and community well and had certainly embraced the model of Community Cohesion, despite some ambivalence towards the National College.

In order to facilitate the Community Cohesion aspect and reduce her own workload, she and her governors had appointed a business manager, David

Carne. David had implemented the majority of the programme, and noted that the success of their programme was based on the following:

- All programmes were low-level and non-threatening, and could involve both parents and pupils
- Parents selected topics whenever possible
- Most activities utilised food as part of the attraction. This included parent breakfast sessions once a term.
- The ability to sustain the programme
- Empowering for parents-the parents are able to run the programme
- Recognition that sometimes, schools not only endeavour to decide what they think the parents want to know, but they can get it wrong and be seen to be arrogant and demanding. They simply pitch parent's programmes at the wrong level.

In summary, both David and Margaret were delighted with the success of the programme. To me, the activities that were in place would be but a small part of what we are already doing. The main learning point however relates to the final bullet point, whereby we must not 'second guess' what we think are the needs of our parents. In this, I believe that our approach could do with a make-over.

I was impressed with the school. The pupils were amazingly friendly and articulate. I joined groups during lunch and I enjoyed listening to their stories and aspirations for the future. The haka performed to me at a welcoming assembly was impressive and all based on viewings of All Black footage. Likewise, I did enjoy the junior assembly and the handing out of assorted reward. It really reminded me of our assemblies, including the large numbers of parents in attendance.

The staff were extremely welcoming and the quality of teaching I observed was very good. The classroom environments were excellent and really celebrated learning.

Margaret Lever was a fantastic host and went out of her way to ensure that the days at her school were extremely full and rewarding. I would also thank

her for allowing me a session with her husband, Dr Deryk Lever. Deryk had held some important positions in the English education system and openly shared his impressions. The warning about the dangers of national testing and obsession with school data was well heeded, particularly after watching pupils at two schools 'practicing' for their S.A.T's.



**School Assembly and welcome**



**All classes bright & attractive**



## **3.2 Other Entities/Agencies Visited**

### **3.2.2 My final meeting in London was with Mr Ceri Morgan, Her Majesty's Inspector for Schools and in-charge of the international division of Ofsted.**

I thank Ceri for taking time out of his busy schedule to meet with me and for the excellent presentation on the work of Ofsted he compiled for me.

He described the whole process of 'reviewing' schools in England and the detailed analysis of the literal mountain of data they produce or procure on the school. I must admit that I couldn't help feeling very fortunate that I was a Principal in New Zealand and worked under a slightly higher trust model. While Ceri would vehemently disagree with my comments and the approach taken in New Zealand, I believe that it is quite flawed, particularly considering their mounting social problems and where they sit internationally on the Pisa results, and does not easily lead to continuous improvement. He firmly believes that without some form of national testing, it is not possible to make accurate judgements about a school, or how the pupils are actually performing. I argue that the data used from one test only, and the practice time that schools put into preparing for that test, is educationally unsound and based on a low trust model of schools. Any form of assessment is simply capturing performance at a given time and can be massively skewed by many factors. While our O.T.J's (overall teacher judgements) and the moderation thereof, does pose problems in gaining consistency, at least we are using a range of assessments to gain an overall picture of how a child is performing against national agreed objectives.

I only hope that we look to other models such as that utilised by Finland (despite the differences in cultural make-up), and use quality teaching and focussed teacher training to make a difference.

We also discussed the Community Cohesion project, for which Ofsted had been in charge of reviewing. Unfortunately, this practice ceased at the beginning of the year. No doubt, while schools in England are very happy with

the removal of one compliance item, it does speak volumes for the hollowness of the government commitment to community engagement.

**3.2.3 The final part of my sabbatical trip was based in Baltimore, U.S.A. with Dr Joyce Epstein. Joyce is Director of the Centre on School, Family and Community Partnerships, and founder of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) based at John Hopkins University.**



The NNPS was adopted by States, counties, districts and schools to help address the government policy of “No Child Left Behind”, and because of the evidential proof that effective partnerships with families and communities improves academic performance.

The NNPS currently has more than 1100 schools, 150 districts and 21 states and other organisations participating.

I was welcomed by Joyce who had prepared a brief and list of scheduled meetings during my time at the centre. Apart from Joyce, I met with Darcy Hutchkins, Brenda Thomas, Marsha Greenfield and Jenn Ganss, all programme facilitators that form part of the leadership team that directs the development and the research that is completed as part of the centre.

Dr Joyce’s work resulted from her awareness of the issues facing children and families in education, particularly amongst poor communities in Baltimore, and her consideration of ways of addressing equity issues. She proceeded to develop the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1987, 1995) and

utilised a Venn diagram to depict the 3 main groups and their impact on children's learning and development. (see appendix)

The three overlapping circles represent parents, schools and communities, and the degree of collaboration or partnership between the 3 can be depicted by moving the circles together or further apart. This relationship can occur at an individual level or involve the whole institution. The focus however is always the child at the centre. As she noted through her research, it appeared that schools were always the dominant group in the partnership and so she posed the questions,

“What would happen if schools really meant it when they invited parents to participate in their children's learning? What activities would we do? What would it look like”?

Following many years of research and studies, Joyce and her team developed what is termed the six types of involvement. These are:

- Parenting
- Communicating
- Volunteering
- Learning at Home
- Decision Making
- Collaborating with the Community

As she states,

“Each type of involvement includes many practices of partnership. Each type presents particular challenges that must be met to involve all families and needed redefinitions of some basic principles of involvement. Finally, each type is likely to lead to different results for students, parents, teaching practices and school climate. Thus, schools must select which practices will help achieve the goals they set for student success and for creating a climate of partnerships”. (Epstein, 2009 p.14)

In her book, *School, Family and Community Partnerships*, Joyce and her team outline in detail such aspects as the rationale for partnerships, the action team approach, plans, actual school stories, and much more. Such is the wealth of information, I do not intend to elaborate in detail, but will briefly discuss what Joyce and the team stressed as being absolutely critical, as well as some information on action teams.

In our discussions, the following points were emphasised:

- Never assume that the school knows what the parents wish to be involved in, or are in sync with community wishes.
- Community partnerships must be planned, and based on annual plans. She does not see it as an 'extra' task.
- Action teams must be formed and given comprehensive training.
- Principal, staff and board commitment is essential.
- It must always be linked not only improving partnerships, but student's achievement.
- The model must be sustainable and not simply an add-on.
- A motto could be, 'Family friendly schools with school friendly families'.
- Discuss with the parents, what are you expecting us to do with your children? As a school, this is what we are doing at present. What can you do, or want to do, to assist?
- Don't try and use the 6 types of involvement rigidly as a template.
- Recognise that partnerships are multi-level. What type of involvement will be dependent on many factors including, available time for working parents.
- The development of partnerships is a process, not a single event. They take time to develop, must be reviewed and evaluated, and continuously improved.

## **4.0 A Process to Enhance Community Engagement with Schools**

### **Step 1**

Form an action team. Because of the differences in the structures of New Zealand schools, this could be done as a sub-committee to the board or PTA and would consist of at least 2-3 teachers from different levels of the school, 2-3 parents with children at different levels, a board member and at least 1 member from the senior leadership team. She suggests that it could also have a member of the wider community and 2-3 pupils from the senior school.

### **Step 2**

Access a small budget which would assist in guiding and supporting the activities planned.

### **Step 3**

Identify the starting points. Joyce indicates a systematic gathering of information about the schools current practice of partnership, along with the views, experiences and wishes of parents, teachers and pupils. This could be achieved in a number of ways including; questionnaires, meetings, surveys, random phone calls, discussions with the board, PTA and staff. She notes that the following areas should be part of any information gathering:

- Present Strengths-what works well, what types, on what school goals for student success?

- Needed Changes-how do we want the partnership to work, what should continue and what should change? To reach school strategies and goals, what practices are needed?
- Expectations-what do teachers/families expect of each other? What do students expect of families/teachers in order to keep their families informed and involved?
- Sense of Community-what families are presently involved and why? Which are not and why? Who are the hard to reach? What could be done to reach these? Are current partnership practices coordinated to integrate all families?
- Links to goals-how are students doing on measures of achievement? On measures of attitude and attendance? On other indicators of success? How might family and community connections assist students in reaching higher goals or greater success? What practices of partnership could contribute to the attainment of particular goals?

#### **Step 4**

Develop the one year Action Plan

With all of the information gathered and consultation completed, a detailed one year plan should be developed. In short, it should address:

Details, responsibilities, costs and evaluation. Specific details for all of these are documented in detail along with a wealth of other support material in "School, Family and Community Partnerships, Your Handbook for Action".

#### **Step 5**

Continue Planning, Evaluating and Improving Programs

As per our 4C of Continuous improvement, a detailed analysis of what worked, what didn't and why, what changes would be required?

I believe that the process has real merit. It is tried and proven and backed by excellent long-term reearch.While the program grew out of the need to assist

families in lower socio-economic areas, Joyce stressed that she has highly effective programmes operating in some of the wealthiest areas of the states.

I would like to thank Dr Joyce Epstein and her team for welcoming me into the centre and for sharing their immense knowledge and experience with me. It was a real privilege to engage with such a world authority and I only hope that I have done justice to the ethos and philosophy of the programme and centre.

## **5.0 Learning Outcomes from Sabbatical**

The sabbatical experience has been excellent. While much of what I have learnt is obviously based on direct experience of visiting schools, institutions, and discussions with assorted educationalists, some is purely as a result of having the time and freedom to think. The ability to unshackle the chains of administrative demands, (much of which really has little to with improving the achievement levels of our pupils), and give some real thought as to how I may assist in making our place better for our whole learning community It has also been an opportunity to both look at best practice in our New Zealand schools and really research issues confronting education

In no particular order:

### **5.1 School is Number One**

While I may be accused of arrogance, our school is most definitely at the forefront of education. While I am more than aware that there is still room for many improvements, I believe that we are performing to a high level, not only academically, but in a great number of other areas which I hope will become apparent during this section of my report.

### **5.2 Our School Website**

This received many accolades from virtually everyone I met in both the United Kingdom and the United States. It was described as bright, colourful, informative and up-to-date. In saying this, and in terms of my sabbatical, there are improvements required to make it more informative for parents especially. Parental input or review would be valuable in achieving this.

### **5.3 Mr Banks' Charter Schools**

As previously noted, I believe that the concept is very flawed and has not been thought through properly. In saying this, it is an interesting concept and very much a 'copy' of what a colleague and I attempted to do some 20 years ago, when we looked at forming our own school, based on what we thought were the needs of our community, rather than heavy government compliance lists. As a matter of interest, we had a sponsor, but struggled at the time to find suitable accommodation and eventually lost interest. Let's hope the sponsors of the Charter Schools don't get disillusioned or feel that they are not getting value for money!

### **5.4 The Need for a Vision**

As a part of the above, it is my contention that consecutive Ministers of Education have shown a very poor understanding of the needs of education, and indeed, pupils. We seem to be continually copying systems from under-performing nations. We continually politicise education and attempt what is often, lame social engineering. New Zealand is performing at a high level in terms of the rest of the world. We do have a 'long tail', but the new initiatives will not alleviate this. The tail and the areas that it exists in are easily identifiable, and it is these that should be addressed. To lumber or encumber all schools with legislation or compliance to deal with the issues is like providing someone with an inoculation after they have caught the disease. It is my contention that New Zealand needs a comprehensive vision for education. A vision that transcends parties, which cannot be tampered with by ministers or governments wishing to score political points, a vision which actually commits to agreed actions.

### **5.5 Leadership**



A schools leadership team is critical. While this may seem to be such an obvious statement, when visiting high performing schools, quality leadership stood out to such a degree that it was almost frightening. All schools that I visited were blessed with passionate and dynamic Principals and senior leaders. Principals who had excellent people skills, combined with very sound educational pedagogy. People who were willing to take a stand against mediocrity. Should this scenario not exist in a school, the school is, I believe, destined to become very average or underperforming. Our model in New Zealand of providing professional development to aspiring Principals is good, but could be better. Improved performance management systems and improved honesty from existing Principals could ensure that those moving into these programmes are genuine candidates for Principalship. Paid release for intensive study is critical, as is exposure to the realities of the job.

## **5.6 Homework**

“Parent engagement in children’s learning at home can give positive effects”. (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005. Biddulph, Biddulph and Biddulph, 2003))

“In general, the largest positive effects were found when schools-usually in association with an external researcher-develop the capacity of parents to support their children’s learning through programmes that are designed to teach them [the parents] specific skills”. (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009p.160)

From what I have viewed, and from numerous readings, I have some niggling worries about our homework policy .These mainly relate to whether or not our homework draws our parents into the academic life of the school. Does it provide an insight into our school? Does it help to create a dialogue? Does it provide parents with any opportunities for feedback? Is it interactive enough? In saying this, homework is a mind field. For every parent that wants more, there are those that don’t believe in it. At Cockle Bay School, we have attempted to develop a policy which is not only quite

focussed on our priorities (literacy/numeracy) but does not become a millstone for teachers that are already under extreme time pressure.

With careful consideration, I think it could be better, and I will provide information showing how some schools have provided parents with excellent information on homework programmes

### **5.7 National Testing**

From what I have seen, no, no, no. In saying this, it is only time until this concept is introduced along with the inevitable 'league tables'.

### **5.8 Our School Curriculum**

In looking at assorted schools' curriculum both in New Zealand and overseas, including the 'international model' which can be purchased at considerable cost, I believe that our school curriculum is an excellent one. It is focussed, responsive to need and conceptually based in the arts, social sciences and science. It attempts to use powerful ideas and topics to capture our children's minds while still concentrating on teaching essential skills and attitudes across all of the learning areas.

It has become apparent to me however that there may well be a significant weakness in our development and review systems. While it is reviewed annually at the leadership level for content, it has never been reviewed for its total effectiveness. This deficiency requires addressing to ensure that not only does it achieve what it set out to do, but meets the learning needs of our pupils. Likewise, while built on what was considered to be sound parental, staff, and pupil consultation, no further consultation has since taken place. It is critical that this occurs in the near future.

### **5.9 Decile Levels**



**School Lunches (a measure of disadvantage), Maes Y Morfa**

A number of countries have devised means for delivering additional funding to schools that are deemed to be in disadvantaged areas. In the U.K, their measure is school lunches, in New Zealand, decile rankings. I feel that whatever system is used, it is wrong. Both in New Zealand and while on sabbatical, I have watched schools spending an in-ordinate amount of time and effort into trying to prove their area, or quantity of disadvantage. This is totally counterproductive and is not assisting pupil's development in any shape or form.

Understandably, parents too appear to have it wrong. The reality is that the larger number on your decile ranking is no real indicator that the school will perform any better. There are as many high decile schools as low, totally under-performing. It just appears to me a little more shameful when it does happen at a higher decile school considering that invariably, the pupils have the ability to progress more quickly because of their background and parents attributes' At Cockle Bay School, I have attempted to ensure that what has been termed "the decile 10 myth of quality" will never apply.

The terms free school lunches, decile levels, get rid of them

## **5.10 Special Needs**

I was impressed with some of the programmes operating in the schools I visited and particularly liked the approach of Maes Y Morfa School. A number of their pupils had so many socialisation issues, they were deemed to be extremely difficult to try and teach. For a period each day, they were put together and taught how to relate to others and the skills needed to operate in a classroom. While I have some problems with withdrawing pupils from their classes and peer group, some of the activities that they were doing would have been almost impossible to achieve in a traditional mixed classroom situation. The teacher involved was adamant that it was working and that it had made a real difference to their home classrooms tone and learning environment.



**Withdrawal group**



**Special Needs area**

The school also took quite a novel approach to pupils who were not performing in the core curriculum. They were withdrawn according to their level rather than age or class level. I am not sure of the social ramifications of this approach, and would need to investigate further.

I am still concerned that we need to give more thought to investigating other approaches in literacy and numeracy for children who are missing basic skills. Is it not worthwhile considering the concept of 'catch up' classes which could operate outside of normal hours, be promoted and funded by the school, and be a genuine adjunct to our teaching programmes, rather than just an outside 'add on'?

### **5.11 Performance Management Systems**

I saw nothing which even approached the system being used at our school. While always being refined, our system is based on our schools, teachers and pupils needs. It is not a one size model that fits all. I thank Mark Keenan, Deputy Principal, Cockle Bay School, for breathing new life into an extremely important aspect of school functioning.

### **5.12 The Tools of ICT**

I saw some excellent infrastructures while travelling, and some effective use of the tools of ICT. I also witnessed an overkill scenario whereby there was a huge range of devices in labs but only used as word processors (and sometimes, games)



**Computer Suite, New North Academy**

. I am more convinced than ever that we must always keep things in perspective and not be swayed by those schools that tout themselves as the experts. We are building an excellent repertoire of technologies which will assist the pupils to learn more effectively. Perhaps even more importantly in our 'journey', we have staff that allows their children to use this equipment, are committed to it, and are always willing to learn.

The trip I might add totally convinced me of the merits of i-pads. I used it all of the time, and as a consequence, it became my main tool for writing, communicating and for photography.

### **5.13 School Environments**

The schools that I visited, despite their socio-economic status, had attractive, well organised and functional environments, both inside and outside of classrooms. In talking to both staff and pupils, they felt very proud of their classroom and grounds. I am convinced that the provision of quality environments is a critical part of the teaching and learning matrix, and I will therefore continue to ensure that with the boards backing, it is always one of the priorities in our annual strategic plan.

### **5.14 Pre-School Education**

Following my trip, I am more enamoured than ever with the concept of having a pre-school based at a Primary School. As noted in discussions pertaining to Maes Y Morfa, it allows a school to commence a rich literacy/numeracy programme before officially commencing school. However, and more importantly, it allows staff to induct the children into the philosophy of the school, the learning and behavioural expectations, and the language of learning.

There would most definitely be pitfalls and impediments, most notably, available space within the school and the Ministry of Education's application process. Nevertheless, I still feel that the concept is worthy of further investigation.

### **5.15 Continuous Improvement**

The absolute power of one of our 4 Cs was constantly affirmed. At times, I witnessed what I would term, a slight arrogance or conceitedness, a feeling that there is little more to learn. On occasions, I also detected a feeling that there was nothing to learn from the 'boy from the antipodes'. I guess that is one reason why the U.K is well down the table in recent Pisa tests.

Our 4C is an excellent tool to help avoid self-satisfaction.

In the long term, mistakes are made, sometimes we may re-invent the wheel, sometimes we fail, but the endeavour to continually evaluate and re-assess is a powerful tool for school improvement.

### **5.16 Children's Learning Journeys**

I am more convinced than ever, mainly because of what I didn't see, that the ability to be able to articulate one's learning journey, prove where you have come from and where you're going is a vital ingredient in effective teaching/learning.

### **5.17 Student Management Systems (SMS)**

I witnessed some very good systems in action. I did get the feeling however, that in some schools, teaching staff weren't always using data to improve practice and that a great deal of data was collected for school-wide analysis as opposed to assisting individuals or groups

Our SMS has massive potential, and I believe that we are moving in the right direction.

### **5.18 Use of Exemplars**

What does high quality learning look like? During discussions with educationalists, and linked with my own research, I was very interested in the work that is going on around the use of exemplars. I feel that our school could make better use of these to assist pupils, teachers and parents to both recognise what quality work may look like, and assist in promoting in-depth learning.

### **5.19 Best Practice in Consultation**

I did develop a data base of ideas gathered from both overseas and New Zealand which I have included in the following section. As you would have seen from my report, this became much less of a priority as I moved increasingly towards examining the whole context of engagement, with consultation but one part of the continuum.

## **6.0 Community Engagement in Summary**

### **Why engage our Parents?**

Ultimately, it leads to improved achievement, performance and development of our pupils, particularly if linked to learning goals.

### **Possible Impediments**

- Lack of trust by staff/parents
- Lack of understanding by the school as how best to do it, and why
- Lack of training for principals and staff



- What if? What if we get 'stuff' that we didn't expect or plan for?
- Arrogance. We are the professionals and we know best
- We're already busy enough!
- Poor leadership/teaching pedagogy?
- We're already doing it?

### **The absolute musts**

- Do it
- Plan for it
- Don't make it an 'add on' process

### **Possible avenues/methods (in no particular order)**

- Open days/mornings
- Curriculum related events
- Extra-curricular events-sports, cultural..
- Parent help
- Develop a 'resource inventory' of parent, staff and community strengths and skills
- Targeted groups
- Random groups
- Coffee meetings
- Reports to parents
- Effective homework
- Newsletters
- Web site
- Samples of work
- Special meetings of parent interest
- Workshops
- Welcoming and open school
- Phone calls/emails
- 1:1 meetings
- PTA involvement and participation

- Ensure that the child is no. 1
- Assemblies, class, team and school
- Graduation
- Questionnaires
- Home visits
- Social networking sites e.g. Facebook
- A parent room/centre
- Family nights
- Family support programmes
- Action Team
- Talk to parents and children for their ideas

### **7.0 In conclusion**

I have learned that there is no place like home. Our school is a vital and dynamic organisation populated with wonderful students from largely wonderful parents, taught by dedicated staff and governed by a committed board.

I have really enjoyed the experience and apart from what I have learnt about education, have learnt much about myself.

Once again, I sincerely thank everyone who assisted me in making it happen.

Graeme Lomas

Principal

## Appendix 1: Differences Between School Types

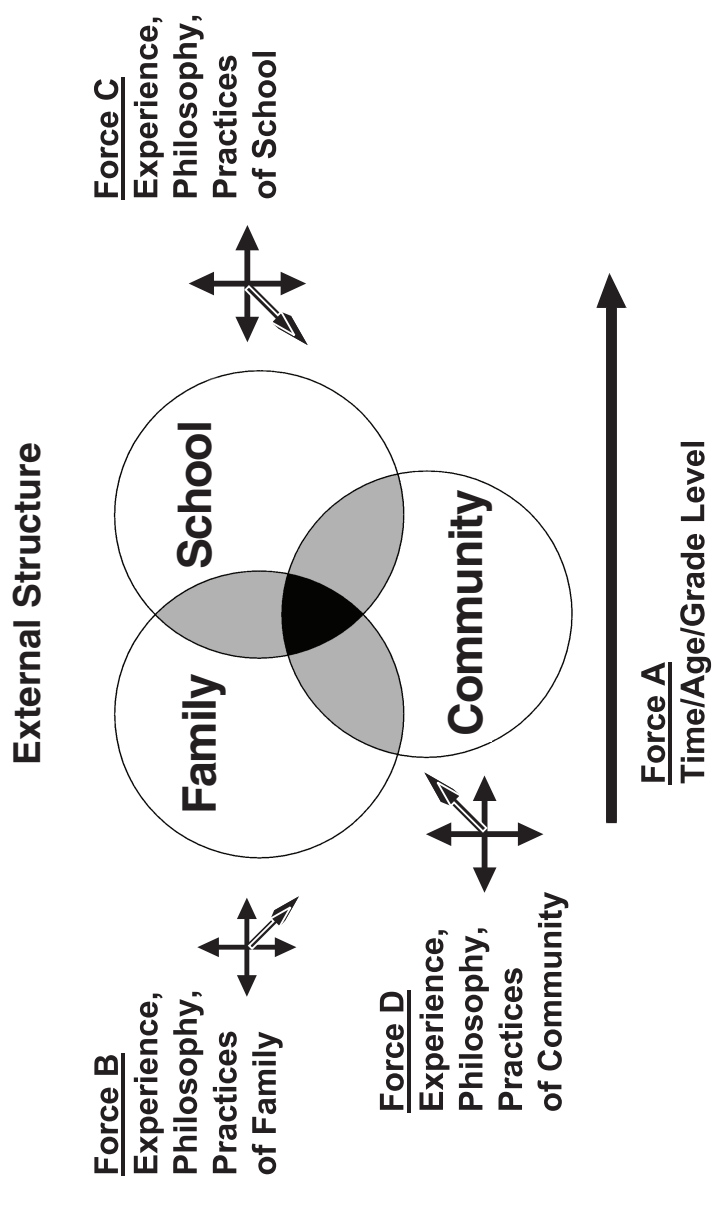
	<b>Free School</b>	<b>Academies</b>	<b>N.Z State</b>
<b>CURRICULUM</b>			
<b>Content</b>	Exempt from following National Curriculum	Exempt from following National Curriculum	Must follow National Curriculum
	Must teach certain subjects including maths, English and science. Must be 'broad and balanced' in curriculum	Must teach certain subjects including maths, English and science. Must be 'broad and balanced' in curriculum	Can focus on specific subjects as long as National Curriculum requirements are still met
<b>Assessments</b>	Required to assess students in accordance with their funding agreement – including at key stage 2 and 4	Required to assess students at all key stages in accordance with their funding agreement	Students must be assessed as per Nag 1 & National Standards
<b>Teaching Hours</b>	Free to change day and term lengths	Free to change day and term lengths	Must work required number of days. Min daily hours = 2<noon & 2>noon

<b>Specialised Programs</b>	Must establish a clear Special Education Needs (SEN) policy following the code of practice for SEN and vulnerable children	Must establish a clear SEN policy following the code of practice for SEN and vulnerable children	Governed by Nag 1. Policy & Procedures as expected
<b>Outcome Indicators</b>	Student outcomes monitored through inspection by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) Must reach national floor targets	Student outcomes monitored through inspection by Ofsted. Must reach national floor targets	Student outcomes monitored through Board, Ministry & ERO Against National Standards
	<b>Free School</b>	<b>Academies</b>	<b>N.Z State</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>			
<b>Restriction on age-range of school</b>	Anything between the 5-19 age range	Anything between the 5-19 age range	5-19 (Ed Act Sec 5)
<b>Admissions</b>	No selection by aptitude permitted  Priority by faith limited to 50% of pupils  Can prioritise up to 10% of secondary pupils on aptitude	No selection by aptitude permitted  Can prioritise up to 10% of secondary pupils on aptitude	No selection by aptitude permitted  No prioritisation in state schools, except in zoning rules
<b>Cap on number of students</b>	Primary – classes limited to 30 pupils by statute  Secondary – none	Primary – classes limited to 30 pupils by statute  Secondary – none	Numbers set by Govt suggested ratios for all levels
<b>FINANCE</b>			
<b>Source of revenue and disbursement</b>	Public-Funding disbursed directly by formula calculated by the DfE. Funding varies between LAs	Public – Funding disbursed directly by formula calculated by the DfE. Funding varies between LAs. Often have additional funding from the academy sponsor	Public – Funding distributed according to formula. Decile funding per level
<b>Revenue per pupil</b>	Comparable to state schools in the local area	Comparable to state schools in the local area	Standard as per formula plus decile funding as appropriate
<b>Allocation</b>	Schools have full flexibility to allocate	Schools have full flexibility to allocate	Schools free to allocate all funds received

	funds as deemed fit, including services normally provided by LA	funds as deemed fit, including services normally provided by LA	
	<b>Free School</b>	<b>Academies</b>	<b>N.Z State</b>
<b>Personnel Management</b>			
<b>Teacher selection criteria</b>	Not required to have teachers with QTS (except SENCO) but are required to have a training and development plan	QTS required	Practising certificate issued by teachers. Council required
<b>Adding non-teaching positions</b>	Free to hire as required	Free to hire as required	Free to hire as required. Budget dependent
<b>Performance incentives</b>	Free to set own pay and conditions	Free to set own pay and conditions	Follow national pay and conditions
<b>Performance Management</b>	Free to evaluate and manage performance as required. Inspected by Ofsted and must fill conditions of Governance	Free to evaluate and manage performance as required. (subject to TUPE restrictions)	School can operate own policy and system, based on collectives and guidelines
<b>Ownership of physical asset</b>	Charitable trusts must be non profit but within that could include charities, parent/teacher groups, universities etc	Charitable trusts	MOE with responsibility delegated to BOT's
<b>Decision-Making and Fiscal responsibility</b>	Trustees/Governing body	Trustees/Governing body	Board of Trustees
<b>Involvement of private sector</b>	Able to subcontract elements of the running and management of the school to other private sector organisations	Able to subcontract elements of the running and management of the school to other private sector organisations	Limited involvement of public sector. Some functions may be delegated (e.g. property manager) but board still accountable
	<b>Free Schools</b>	<b>Academies</b>	<b>N.Z State</b>
<b>Accountability</b>			
<b>Reporting requirements</b>	Analysis and monitoring performed by DfE and Ofsted	Monitored by YPLA	Monitored and analysed by Board and Ministry
<b>Public Transparency</b>	All results made publicly available	All results made publicly available	All results made publicly available

## **Appendic 2: Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

**Theoretical Model**  
**OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE OF**  
**FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING**



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