

# Presentation to CPPA members 15<sup>th</sup> May 2008

## Community Consultation

### Some useful quotes from the NZ Curriculum,

p.9 Principles

#### Community Engagement

“The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whanau and communities.”

p.34 Effective Pedagogy.

#### Creating a Supportive Learning Environment.

“Effective teachers...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...The classroom culture exists within and alongside many other cultures, including the culture...of the local community.”

p.37 Design and Review

“Curriculum change should build on existing good practice and aim to maximise the use of local resources and opportunities.”

p.37. “The national curriculum...gives schools the **scope, flexibility and authority** they need to design and shape their curriculum so that teaching and learning is meaningful and beneficial to their **particular communities** of students.”

Starting from the point of view that education is a partnership between home and school and the most effective education is that which engages all aspects of a child’s life, we view the new curriculum as an opportunity to draw our community into a discussion about the nature of teaching and learning at Southbridge School.

In my view the new curriculum reaffirms (if we are prepared to suspend our disbelief) a couple of important principles that defined the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms. These are:

- Self-management
- Autonomy

Self-management is about the BOT and staff making important decisions on the operation of the school, on staffing and on curriculum delivery.

Autonomy is about a school reflecting the character and aspirations of its community.

Autonomy is promoted through community consultation – always with the goal of improving student achievement and welfare by building stronger links between home and school.

### **What Are We Doing?**

Very simply, we are promoting ways of talking to our community about teaching and learning.

What is not quite so simple is engaging the community in what is often a different kind of conversation than they are used to. Most ‘consultation’ with communities works in well-worn areas: comment on policies, fundraising, property. Conversations about teaching and learning are usually confined to parent/teacher interviews and the occasional survey. These involve us as the professionals in the school either dispensing information or seeking feedback. There is very little dialogue.

With this in mind we began 12 months ago to draw our community into a conversation about the curriculum.

1. Home and School: Introducing The Schooling Strategy, esp. pp.26-28 – Children’s learning is nurtured by families and whanau. Drawing the H&S into a wider view of their role in the school. encouraging them to see themselves as a voice in a dialogue about curriculum, a representative voice of the parent community, and a link to take ideas back to that community.
2. Communicating a big idea. *2020VISION*. Try to cut through the complexity of curriculum and the terrible drag of ‘edu-speak’ to reach the community in a way that invites them to participate. Keep it simple: ‘The Vanishing School’, ‘Inside-Outside Learning’
3. Strategic Planning Day; July 2007. Offsite, involving staff, BOT and parent reps (via H&S). Introduced new curriculum, picked apart the big picture stuff from school and considered the questions: ‘What do we believe about good teaching and learning?’ ‘Where do we want our children to be in their learning by 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2020; and how do we support them to get there?’
4. Parent focus group. Open-ended. Irregular meetings. A ‘think tank.’ Conversations can be global but try to direct these towards specific outcomes.
5. Constant communication. Weekly newsletter, kerbside conversations, school events.
6. Reach wider than immediate parent group. Foster key contacts within the wider community, establish relationships with community agencies and groups. ‘Angels,’ school gardens.
7. Charter review and annual plan. Involve parents/community in setting and reviewing annual goals. Make sure there are curriculum goals that these people must engage with and discuss.

8. Community Survey.

**Pitfalls and Brainwaves:**

1. The smokescreen of educational jargon. Our challenge is to frame the conversation in language that doesn't scare the community away. Refer to Developing Partnerships resource. Sometimes the jargon problem reflects...
2. ...an unwillingness in us to confront the nature of power relationships within our schools. In my view we will achieve the best outcomes for students if we, principals and teachers, are genuinely committed to reframing the balance of power within the home-school partnership. One way that we can demonstrate this is to...
3. ...act. In my experience consultation too often founders on the rocks of inaction. We generate lots of words and intentions but parents get frustrated if they see no real outcomes. It is crucial to have some highly visible outcomes of consultation early in the process and to demonstrate a clear process for managing ideas, suggestions, feedback. Example: school gardens, Rakaia Island forests. Parade the outcomes – “this is what **2020VISION** looks like.” Seek further input - “What do you think of this view of **2020VISION**?” Is it what you meant? Do we need to adjust the vision?
4. Engage expert advice. Brian Annan's message to us from the last workshop. For us the research team serves the purpose of bringing a new perspective to the discussions and creates further opportunities for the community to engage in consultation. Sometimes a third party can draw out ideas and opinions that are not expressed to staff or BOT. Work with other local schools to fulfil this role.

**Good Resource:**

Developing Partnerships: Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriott and Poskitt.

**This presentation is available. My contact is on the CPPA directory or through our website.**