# From Values and Beliefs about Learning to Principles and Practice

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*Visions are powerful mental images of what we want to create in the future. They reflect what we care about most, and are harmonious with our values and sense of purpose.*
*. . .*
*The tension we feel from comparing our mental image of a desired future with today's reality is what fuels a vision.*

*Marjorie Parker (Parker, 1990:2)*

## Introduction

Since the early eighties my work has focussed on helping school communities learn how to make schools better places for learning. These communities often have a vision of a preferred future but experience a tension between their vision and their current reality. They strive towards their vision by becoming self-directing and reflective learning communities.

To live being a 'learning community' is not an easy process. There are many forces working against such an approach. The forces I have found to work most strongly against the creation of learning communities result from tendencies to:

1. react to outside mandates or pressure for changed practice by accepting practices in an uncritical, unquestioning manner

2. adopt a mentality of 'keeping up with the Joneses and, what Michael Fullan (Fullan, 1991 ) has termed 'group think'.

3. act out of the patterns of the past rather than as deliberate and conscious designers

4. look for simple solutions to complex problems – to look for 'black or white', 'either - or' solutions.

To counteract these forces I believe we need to make an essential shift in mind set. We need to consciously adopt a different emphasis and approach to development. We need:

• to move away from 'knee-jerk' reactions to change, and the calls for changed practice to focus on defining, and working towards what we value and believe

• to make explicit what we stand for and what gives direction to our actions

• to institute feedback processes within our school communities to evaluate whether our actions achieve our values and visions.

Simply stated, we need *values and vision driven development* in which the question we are regularly asking of ourselves, as individual educators and school communities, is *how well are we achieving what we value and believe; how well does our current situation match our vision of what is possible?*

In this paper I wish to:

- promote a values and vision based approach to school development
- share some processes and strategies I have used with teachers and school communities to engage in a values and vision driven approach
- present a number of principles of effective learning which I have distilled from twenty years of research on learning, and
- suggest implications for educational design and educational practices based on the principles of effective learning.

## Developing a values and vision based approach to school development

> *Values are the ideals that give significance to our live, that are reflected through the priorities we choose, and that we act on consistently and repeatedly.*
>
> *Brian Hall (1994:39)*

There has been a tendency in education for policy to be made without involving all the stakeholders. Decisions made by policy makers then tend to be imposed on schools in a 'top down' manner. In these days of performance contracts, even decisions which are not mandated in policy are perceived lower down the ladder as if they are mandatory because the people higher up the ladder have written performance agreements which specify how, and by when, a certain number of schools will have implemented the policy. As a result, many in education feel the pressure from outside, or above, to implement policy and react in a 'knee-jerk' way. To relieve the pressure they do what they are told and introduce policy without asking 'why' they should. They pay lip service to the policy; the words are spoken, the paperwork is completed, the policies are written. It all 'looks good' and in turn higher up the ladder the words are spoken, the paperwork is done the performance indicators appear to be met. And so we revolve on a merry-go-round of policies and words paying lip-service to the intended improvement, but within the walls of the school and classroom, little changes. As a result, for the teachers there is a growing cynicism with administration and outside bureaucracies because of the 'add on' effect of the paperwork, and procedures. Teachers feel that their attention and energy are diverted away from the heart of the learning-teaching endeavour.

Much of the tension and cynicism that I have witnessed between schools and 'the system' and between teachers and 'the management', is to do with how decisions about professional practice are made. Those who direct act as if they value top-down decision making and hierarchical leadership, whereas the teachers and school communities, on the receiving end of these decisions, value the right to participate in making decisions which affect them directly. Very often teachers or schools go through the motions of responding to directives and pay lip service to changes because they feel powerless to question them.

**A different story**

Some Principals and school communities respond differently. One newly appointed Principal of a school was faced with strong encouragement from her director of schools to institute a school council. Instead of reacting in reflex, 'knee-jerk' way she asked, "What educational values and beliefs underpin a decision to have a school council?". Her responses were: "I *value* parents as partners in the education of their children; I *believe* that parent involvement in the education of their children has a positive effect on learning outcomes for children." Then she asked: "Will developing a school council lead to true partnership and involvement of parents?". Her answer was "No, not at this time, since I have a high percentage of non-English speaking parents and of those who speak English only a small percentage have shown any intention of being involved in the school. If partnership and involvement are what I value and believe in, then that is what I need to work on."

From there the new Principal, with the teachers and parents, developed strategies and processes to *involve* parents and to develop true *partnerships*. Community meetings were held in different languages and parents shared their views and listened to and explored the schools' approaches. Parents came into classrooms, discussions about learning and learning approaches took place, many more parents became involved and partnerships between the parents and the school developed in a variety of areas. These included the formation of a company which publishes the children's' writing, and . . . Eventually, eighteen months later the Principal was able to establish with the parents and staff a School Council which was truly collaborative. Not only did the School Council truly reflect partnership and involvement, it also reflected another value articulate by the school community – the empowerment of learners. Students are now voting members of the School Council.

There are two key differences in the approach taken by this Principal compared with those who reacted in a 'knee-jerk' way. Firstly, she was acting from a particular mind set about leadership within the overall organisation. This Principal valued the right of individual Principals and individual schools to make considered decisions about their own futures and the means to achieve their preferred futures and acted in accord with what she valued. She did not value individual schools falling in line with directives just because they were directives from above.

The second thing this Principal did differently from most was to define what was valued and what was believed would make a difference to the children's' learning. She then made values and beliefs the basis for action rather than simply reacting to the pressure for a particular practice. Her constant guiding question for evaluating current and potential new practices being: *"How does this practice help us achieve what we say we value and how does it aid learning based on what we know about how children learn?"*

This approach can be represented visually as in Figure 1. At the heart of the process is the identification and clarification of the values and beliefs of the community. These then form the basis for developing a set of principles or guidelines which guide conduct or action.
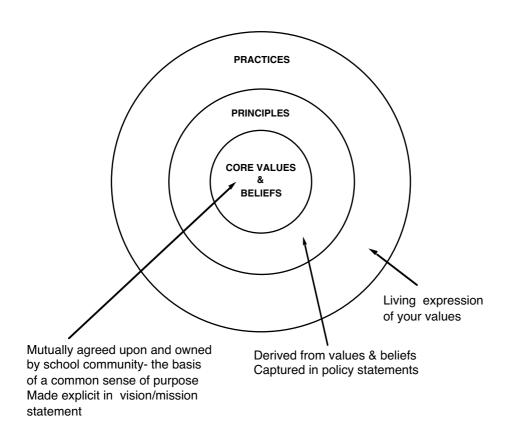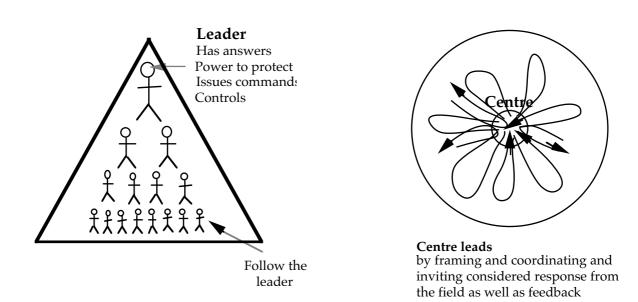
The diagram shows three concentric circles. From outer to inner: PRACTICES, PRINCIPLES, CORE VALUES & BELIEFS.

Labels with arrows pointing to the circles:
- Mutually agreed upon and owned by school community- the basis of a common sense of purpose Made explicit in vision/mission statement (points to CORE VALUES & BELIEFS)
- Derived from values & beliefs Captured in policy statements (points to PRINCIPLES)
- Living expression of your values (points to PRACTICES)

**Figure 1      The relationship between core values and beliefs and practices**

In terms of Figure 1, at an overall school level and at the level of the individual teacher I am promoting working from the inside out, from values and beliefs to practices – but I am quick to acknowledge that it is really a dynamic process. Just as seeking to achieve what we value and believe can lead to a refinement of practices so, too, the trialling of new practices can often lead one to refine or redefine values and beliefs.    If we are truly *learning* , it will  be a dynamic, interactive  process but at any point in time a learning teacher, a learning school, will be able to identify what values and beliefs are the basis for particular practices, they will be engaged in reflecting upon how particular practices help them  achieve what they value and believe and their values and beliefs will be continually revisited and refined.

## The heart of the matter

The difficulty with the current dominant  mode of operating is not simply because policy is formed without involving  all  the stakeholders. The problem is partly that, even when there has been wide consultation to develop policy, *people receiving the policy or guidelines do not evaluate them* from the point of view of how they help them work towards what they value and believe. What is required is a *changed mind set, a different expectation, a different approach*.   The key challenge is to create truly interactive processes for school development. The  challenge for those involved in forming policy is to frame and form ideas and then invite, and expect  school communities  to make 'informed' decisions about new policy based on the values and beliefs of the their particular communities.    This

approach requires that the policy makers be influenced in the first place by those school communities, through consultation and representation. It also depends on the willingness by central bureaucracies to allow their reforms to be actively owned and shaped by different school communities. ***The challenge for those directing, the central authority, is to change the focus from dictating from the top to co-ordinating and supporting from the centre.*** [1]

**Leader**
Has answers
Power to protect
Issues commands
Controls

Follow the
leader

**Centre leads**
by framing and coordinating and inviting considered response from the field as well as feedback

**Figure 2    Leadership for direction and control versus leading for coordination and support**

The essence of the approach I am suggesting is to balance the focus of our attention on the *practice* or action with a focus on the *core values and beliefs* of the organisation and the expression of these values and beliefs as *principles or guidelines for action*.   The points of reference are always:

• what do we value?

• what are the beliefs about learning which underpin a particular practice and are they reasonable beliefs based on current research on how we learn?

• how does our current practice help us achieve what we value?

• how will a suggested new, or different, practice improve our ability to achieve what we value and believe?

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[1]    Although independent schools are not as subject to political or system pressures and forces as state schools and non-government systemic schools, independent schools feel external pressures just as acutely -pressures from parents, pressures from the 'old-boys' or 'old-girls' networks, pressures to survive commercially, pressures to 'keep up with the Jones'', pressures to prove that they are at the leading edge or pressures to do what they have always done because they have always done it this way. The challenge to develop a values and beliefs based approach is just as pertinent and just as difficult.    In fact the

You might ask how does this approach differ from setting and stating goals for education? The approach I am advocating is more fundamental. We have, and set, particular goals *because* of what we value.

Stepping outside of education for a moment . . . imagine you have just bought a small farm which is in a run down state. What is entailed in development of the farm or in choosing to develop or not develop the farm? Before you can set goals for development there are several more fundamental questions to be answered.

- *What was your purpose?*
  Why did you buy it?
  Why does it exist for you?

- *What do you value?*
  What sort of farm do you want? Is it for privacy, is it for lifestyle? Is it to give you an opportunity to contribute to tree regeneration and conservation? Is it a money making venture?

- *What is your vision?*
  What do you want to create in the future? How does the current reality of your farm differ from your vision?

*Clarification of your values and vision are essential to goal setting.* Before a school can make decisions related to directions in the school, it needs to:

- establish its values and beliefs
- recognise that such values and beliefs are constantly revisited in the light of new practices, new realisations about learning, and changes within the local, national and global communities.

## Processes for developing a values and beliefs based approach

### The need for new mind sets

Adopting a values and beliefs based approach means overcoming the forces which work against it. Many practices in education are the legacy of a previous time, of a mind set appropriate for a different era. Yet many of us have had our teaching practice shaped and patterned by our own experiences. We have a tendency to "do what was done to us" without consciously clarifying and making explicit our values and beliefs; without deliberately investigating the congruence between our practices and what we value and believe.

> *. . . at the heart of the Values Shift is the idea that values can be chosen consciously and measured, and can become a tool that allows us to choose a new set of futures, rather than live our lives under some other person's directive.*
>
> Brian Hall (1994:14)

The processes outlined on the following pages illustrate some ways in which we can adopt a deliberate and conscious design approach to developing practices in schools. Through raising awareness in teachers', parents' and school leaders' minds about the assumptions that frame their teaching or expectations new mind sets can be formed.

The fundamental question of how well we are achieving what we value and believe in translates into three sub questions as we move from philosophy to the development of practices.

*What do we value?*

*What do we believe about how people learn?*

*What do we need to do to improve our practice so that it more truly reflects our values and beliefs?*

Perhaps focussing our attention on practices comes about because when we start to grapple with expressing our values and beliefs we walk on difficult ground.

- Will articulating our values set them in concrete and stultify growth?

- Can we, as communities possibly reach agreement on our values and beliefs? Do we want to?

- How can we state our values and beliefs explicitly and specifically enough so that they are not simply parenthood statements nor statements which imprison the individual creativity of teachers?

- What beliefs about learning are reasonable beliefs?

As with many aspects of learning, the *process* of articulating and sharing our values and beliefs is critically important; the *processes* of imagining, trialling and evaluating new or different practices are essential to true growth and learning. In fact it is not the formulated statements that make the difference. It is *experiencing visioning and engaging in the process of evaluating your practices* against what you value and belief that are critical to the power of a values and vision driven approach.

From my experience in facilitating development in schools over the past fifteen years I have learned a lot about the necessary ingredients for effective development. A couple of points are pertinent to the current discussion.

**The role of the 'outsider'**

Many a time after working with a school on particular areas of need, I have reflected on the fact that there were people present within the school who had the skills and the knowledge to do what I had done for the school community. I have also reflected on the fact that, as an outsider I cut across the internal politics and that I do not represent particular vested interests. It is much easier for the insiders to accept that the outsider's interests are in the best interests of all. The need for an 'outsider' is heightened when working in particularly sensitive areas. Values identification and clarification is one such area.

**Comprehensive and integrated review**

As I have worked with Ned Herrmann's whole brain processing model (Herrmann 1989; Atkin 1993), I have come to appreciate its power in framing and guiding an integrated and comprehensive approach to many aspects of learning. My own model of Integral Learning (Atkin: 1993) uses Ned Herrmann's model to make explicit the foundation architecture of the thinking processes essential to meaningful learning and to describe how different ways of knowing are derived from an emphasis on particular ways

of processing. When using the whole brain model as a guide to designing school review processes, four aspects emerge as essential to comprehensive and integrated review. In terms of the model these are captured in Figure 3.
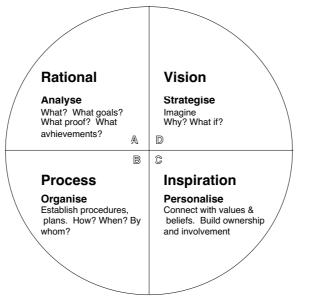


**Figure 3     Aspects essential to comprehensive, integrated review**

In fact this model captures the essence of what I've been arguing for in this paper. When practices are simply imposed on teachers or schools it's equivalent to placing all the emphasis in one quadrant – B quadrant. You might argue that policies are logically derived and have a rationale – A quadrant. Even when both A and B quadrant thinking have been involved in formulating policy, unless the teachers and schools have been through the same thinking process there is no ownership and no learning. What is more, unless C and D quadrant thinking are engaged there is little motivation or inner drive to act differently. In promoting a values and vision based approach I am putting in a claim for injection of 'right mode' processing. But values and vision are not sufficient. Beliefs about learning must be founded in the best of what is known about how we learn – they must be backed by knowledge of the learning process and knowledge of the conditions that enhance learning (A quadrant). Processes and strategies are then developed that are congruent with one's values and beliefs.

It is one thing to state the rhetoric - how do we encourage and facilitate the approach? In the next section of this paper I will outline, and partially develop, processes I have used to engage individual educators and whole school communities in defining and clarifying their values and beliefs and in adopting an approach which continually seeks to develop practices and actions consistent with these values and beliefs.

**Specific processes for developing a values and beliefs based approach**

Critical to a values and beliefs based approach are the processes of:

• creating shared vision

• identifying values and beliefs

• clarifying values and beliefs

• examining practices for alignment with values and beliefs

- formulating principles and designing practices based on values and beliefs

Identifying your core values, individually as professionals and collectively as a school community, helps you articulate why you are a teacher, why you educate, why a school exists, who you are, what you stand for, what is most important to you and what your vision is.  When individuals can bring into the open the values and assumptions behind their thinking and actions, and an atmosphere of trust is developed, true dialogue can occur and an opportunity for collective learning can emerge.  In my experience working with many groups on this process, it is also very likely that people start to see beyond their differences to the values and elements of vision that they all share.

Making explicit what we stand for is never an easy task.  Attempts to put into words our innermost thoughts and feelings run the risk of producing statements that sound empty, that do not capture the richness of our meaning and of producing statements that are so general that their translation into practice is a difficult process.

Processes for articulating our values and beliefs need to be designed in ways that take these difficulties into account.  Processes to stimulate expression of values and beliefs need to draw on intuitive, holistic ways of knowing ('right' mode – C and D quadrants, Figure 3)  while processes for clarification need to provide opportunities to question and clarify the meaning of language used as well as opportunities to debate whether it is reasonable to hold certain beliefs ('left' mode – A and B quadrants, Figure 3) .

**Stimulating the expression of implicit values**

Two techniques that have been used successfully for stimulating expression of *values* and beliefs include guided imagery and photo language.   Both strategies connect with implicit, intuitive ways of knowing and stimulate expression of this implicit knowing in explicit forms.

**Guided imagery**

**Preparation**

- It is helpful to use soft music in the background and a relaxation technique to allow focussing and freeing the mind of distracting thoughts.

**Process**

- Ask those involved to remember, to re imagine, a learning-teaching experience from their professional lives in which they experienced a high degree of professional satisfaction, a time in which it was obvious to them why they were teaching and why they wanted to be a teacher.

- Allow several minutes for reliving the experience perhaps with some gentle direction to focus on the images, the emotions, their sense of the learner's experience.

- Ask that they capture their feelings and thoughts and images in stream of consciousness writing of short phrases and words.

- Ask them to share in pairs, or trios, their writings and memories.

- Individuals then develop some statements that they could incorporate in their own professional statement of values and beliefs and which they would like to see captured in the school's expression of values and beliefs.

**Photolanguage**[2] is another strategy that engages and connects with our more intuitive ways of knowing. A series of photos depicting various images of humans and human life are spread around and individuals are asked to select photos which capture powerful, positive images for them. In discussing with others why they chose particular images the values they hold are made explicit and can then be captured in written statements.

**Identifying values**

Another approach is to give a list of core values and their definitions and ask individuals (or groups) to select a number - say five – of values that represent their educative purpose. If this process is working towards a collective statement of core values, individuals are then asked to share with their group what they chose and why. Various weighting techniques can then be used to identify the values the group holds as most important.

The work of Benjamin Tonna and Brian Hall (Hall, 1994) on identifying and defining a comprehensive set of human values provides a powerful base from which to select values definitions for this process. Using a list to choose from can cut through lengthy debates about semantics. Terms and definitions can be modified during the process as the group sees the need.

*Example:*

- From the following list of values, Table 1, select the *five* values that you believe are the most central to a school's educative purpose, the most important values for a school to hold and live by. Selecting five does not mean that you do not hold other values as important – simply that the five you have chosen represent the five most fundamental values for you as an educator.

- Then ask the individuals to share what they chose and why. The point here is not necessarily to reach consensus but to clarify and deepen thinking.

- Individuals are free to modify their own selections as desired.

- Collate the values selected into one main list.

- Ask people to distribute 100 points between the values to indicate the relative importance of each value to them.

- Add up the weighting's from each person for each value listed to represent the collective values and relative importance of each as expressed in the group.

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2    For more information about the use of photolanguage as a process and to obtain sets of photos, contact The Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sydney, Leichhardt, NSW

**Achievement/success:** Accomplishing something noteworthy and admirable in the world of work or education

**Accountability/Ethics**: Awareness of one's personal system of moral principles

**Adaptability:** The ability to adjust readily to changing conditions and to remain pliable during ongoing processes.

**Art/Beauty:** Experiencing and/or providing pleasure through that which is aesthetically appealing in both natural and human-made creations.

**Authority/Honesty:** Freedom to express feelings and thoughts in a straight forward, objective manner.

**Administration/control:** Having specific management structures in a business or institution.

**Care:** Being emotionally and physically supported.

**Collaboration:** Cooperation and interdependence between all members of the community, all levels of management

**Competition:** Energised by a sense of rivalry.

**Community:** Will to create a group for the purpose of ongoing mutual support and creative enhancement of each individual

**Confidence/Competence:** Realistic and objective confidence that one has the skill to in the world of work and to feel that those skills are a positive contribution.

**Conformity:** Order from conformity to a established norms.

**Creativity:** Original thought and expression.

**Discipline:** Restraint and direction to achieve order.

**Diversity:** Equal opportunity for people of diverse backgrounds.

**Education/Certification:** Completing a formally prescribed process of learning and receiving documentation of that process.

**Education/Knowledge -insight:** The pursuit of truth through patterned investigation, motivated by increased intuition and unconsciously gained understanding of the wholeness of reality.

**Efficiency:** Designing processes and methods to result in least waste.

**Equality:** Equal rights and value for all people.

**Equity:** Commitment to defend moral and ethical claim of all persons to legal, social and economic equality and fairness.

**Expressiveness/Joy:** Ability to share feelings openly and spontaneously.

**Growth:** The ability to enable an individual or organisation to grow creatively.

**Hierarchy/order:** Methodical, harmonious arrangement of persons and things ranked above one another in conformity to establish standards of what is good or proper.

**Integration/wholeness:** Working to develop the inner capacity to organise the personality (mind, body and spirit) into a coordinated, harmonious totality.

**Membership:** Pride in belonging to and functioning as an integral part of an organisation.

**Obedience/duty:** Dutifully complying with obligations established by authorities.

**Ownership:** Personal possession of skills, decisions from which one derives a sense of personal authority.

**Prestige/image:** Physical appearance that reflects success and achievement, gains the esteem of others and promotes success.

**Productivity:** Energised by generating and completing tasks and achieving externally established goals and expectations.

**Quality/evaluation:** Appreciating objective appraisal as necessary for personal growth.

**Responsibility:** Being personally accountable for and in charge of a course of action.

**Rights/respect:** Respecting the worth of another.

**Security:** A safe place or relationship where one is free from cares and anxieties and feels protected.

**Service/vocation:** Motivation to use one's gifts and skills to contribute to society.

**Self-actualisation:** The inner drive towards experiencing and expressing the totality of one's being.

**Self-worth:** The knowledge that when those one respects and esteems really know him/her, they will affirm that he/she is worthy of respect.

**Tradition:** Recognising the importance of ritualising history in order to enrich meaning.

**Trust:** The capacity to hear one another's thoughts & feelings actively & accurately & to express personal thoughts and feelings in a climate of mutual confidence in one another's integrity.

**Workmanship:** Concern with quality and highly developed skill.

**Table 1     Values definitions [selected and adapted from Hall (Hall 1994: 225-236)]**

**Creating shared vision**

Guided imagery, in addition to being used for identifying and expressing values, can also be used for *visioning*. Visions are images and thus to capture them and connect with them it is important to use strategies which tap into our intuitive, imaginative ways of knowing.

The process is similar to that described above (p9). In a relaxed state, the facilitator guides those visioning five or ten years into the future. It is often helpful to use a transition phase. For example, participants are asked to imagine entering an elevator. On the wall of the elevator is a set of buttons depicting one year, three years, five years hence. Participants are asked to imagine pushing one of the buttons, to feel the elevator rising slowly, to feel time passing and gradually they arrive in the future. The doors of the elevator open and they enter the future. Some key questions are then directed to the participants to focus aspects of their visioning. For school these might be statements and questions like:

*"See the students in their learning environment. Watch the students involved in learning. See the teacher. Note how the students relate to each other . . . to the teacher. What is the physical environment like? How are the students interacting with technology?" etc.*

To do justice to the images they are best captured in drawings, metaphors and stories. Key words can be jotted down to capture the experience. When people have had enough time to capture their images they are then asked to share their vision and to describe their drawings and diagrams.

From listening to the visions of each group member it is possible to capture the similarities and differences in the visions. The common elements of the vision can be expressed in words as a written statement and also in images.

The important process here is not the production of the statement or expression. It is the mental images that are formed in visioning which provide powerful motivation for action. Our mental images create the tension between current reality and the preferred future.


**Identifying and clarifying beliefs about learning**

One of the most difficult aspects in developing a set of beliefs about learning for a group is in wording the belief statements. Processes which encourage debate about the meaning of belief statements are critical to effective clarification.

A process I have found useful in identifying and clarifying beliefs about learning is first to generate a set of statements of beliefs about learning with *little or no attention given to the wording* and including some statements which you consider most teachers would not believe. For example, statements like those listed below.

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### CLARIFICATION OF BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING EXERCISE

1   I believe that teachers are the authorities and it is their role to transmit information to students.

2   I believe that students have an innate desire to learn - to create meaning.

3   I believe that all students can learn.

4   I believe that regular feedback is vital for teachers, students and parents.

5   I believe that students need to be motivated to learn by external pressure.

6   I believe that student learning can be improved by them developing an awareness of their own learning style and learning processes.

7   I believe students learn best when in a highly structured learning environment which focuses on mastery through repetition and drill.

8   I believe that students who think for themselves create discipline problems for the teacher.

9   I believe that students' learning can be demonstrated effectively in a written test.

10  I believe that students learn best when they experience ownership of their learning.

11  I believe that students learn effectively when they integrate experience, imagination, information and application.

12  I believe that all students learn best when their performance is compared to the performance of others.

13  I believe that students can and do learn from each other.

14  I believe that everyone learns in the same way.

15  I believe that some subjects are intrinsically more rigorous than others.

16  I believe that the prime purpose of schools is to prepare students for university.

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**Table 2      Beliefs statements for clarification exercise**

Then comes the values 'clarification walk'. A statement (it is best to pick one which you anticipate will create some controversy) is read out to the group and people are asked to arrange themselves on a continuum from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', having been warned to be aware of 'group think' and peer pressure. Individuals are then invited to explain why they took the position they did on the continuum and the ensuing debate is facilitated. When several statements have been clarified in this way, people work in pairs to take each of the statements and reword them so that they are strongly in agreement with the statement. It is one thing to identify and clarify our values; it is a different matter to examine our practices in terms of our values and beliefs.

**Processes for examining our practices in terms of our underlying values and beliefs**

Why do we employ certain practices? How are they a manifestation of what we value and believe? Many teachers have never examined their practices in this way and often find the process quite unfamiliar and consequently quite difficult.

Take an educational practice such as giving homework. Spend a few moments thinking about the *educational* reasons for giving or not giving homework. I emphasise 'educational' reasons because at this point I do not want to cloud the issue with reasons such as **"Parents expect it"**. When you have identified your educational reasons for giving and/or not giving homework explore behind those reasons to expose the values and the beliefs about learning which underpin your reasons.

Some typical responses that I have gathered from workshop sessions using this process are captured in Table 2. As you read the common responses people suggest as educational reasons for giving homework you can see that they consider homework to be an appropriate vehicle for achieving things that are valued, and for supporting learning in various ways.

As you consider the reasons people suggest for not giving homework you can see that they consider that giving homework works against things that they value. What I would like to suggest is that this process illustrates that we cannot simply say there should or should not be the practice of homework. What we can ask and answer is:

> *"In this situation, is giving homework helping us achieve what we value and believe?*
>
> *Is it in any way working against what we value and believe?"* and
>
> *"What is the nature of the homework we need to give to satisfy the educational reasons we have for giving homework?"*

Different situations will bring forth different responses to those questions.

For both sets of responses, reasons for and against giving homework, there are further questions to ask. If because of *concern about inequity*, for example, a teacher or school decides not to give homework, my questions to them would be:

- How, within your normal program are you giving opportunities for students to practice skills and consolidate learning?
- How, within your normal program are you allowing for students to work at their own pace?
- How are you creating opportunities for parents to share in what is being done at school?
- Is it possible to set the type of homework which doesn't require resources – personal or physical, beyond what the students themselves have available?

If teachers are setting homework because they value linking *school learning to life learning*, my question would be:

- How are you designing the nature of the homework activities to ensure that happens?

If they are setting homework to *allow for students to work at their own pace* my question would be:

- How are you creating a climate in which the students value additional time for learning rather than seeing it as a punishment?

| Educational reasons for giving homework *Underlying values and beliefs* | Educational reasons against giving homework *Underlying values and belief* |
|---|---|
| - to give an opportunity to consolidate learning through practice<br><br>*Belief: Aspects of learning require regular practice for consolidation and to develop automaticity.* | - can lead to inequities because of the different resources and attitudes of parents<br><br>*Value: Equal opportunity is valued* |
| - so that parents share in what is being done at school<br><br>*Value and belief: We value parents as partners in education and believe that parent involvement has a positive influence on learning outcomes.* | - children need time to play<br><br>*Belief: Play is an important aspect for healthy development of children.*<br>*Value: We value leisure as well as work.* |
| - to develop study habits<br><br>*Belief: We believe that students will need to continue to learn independently outside of their workplace and the discipline of completing regular homework will instil good habits.* | - can lead to confusion and stress if the parents do not understand the process<br><br>*Value: We value learning and learning together as a positive experience.* |
| - to link learning in school with life learning<br><br>*Belief: Learning occurs in all aspects of life not just at school. Homework provide an opportunity to link learning in the classroom to learning outside the school.* | - children need time to participate in family activities and learn to be cooperative members of a family group.<br><br>*Value: We value the social skills learned by cooperating in the family group .* |
| - to allow for students to work at their own pace<br><br>*Belief: We believe that different students require different amounts of time for learning* | |

**Table 2      Typical workshop responses to reasons for giving or not giving homework**

The same process as used to examine the educational reasons for giving homework, and the underlying values and beliefs, can be used to examine any educational practice. Often we try to debate whether or not we should

employ a particular practice or take particular action. Debate at that level is bound to fail. We can only effectively debate alternative actions or the use of particular practices at the level of the educational values and beliefs underpinning them. Actions and practices are merely vehicles for manifesting values and beliefs – they can only be compared or debated in terms of their capacity to help us achieve what we value.

As a reflection exercise:

- if you are a teacher reading this, think of a lesson you have taken recently. Write down all the procedures you used in the lesson and explore the assumptions underpinning the procedures

- if you are in a management role and are not teaching, think of a decision you made recently. Explore the assumptions underpinning your decision.

As in the example on homework, you may find it helpful to first state your reasons and then unpack the values and beliefs underlying the reasons.

Challenging as it is to expose the assumptions behind our actions, an even more difficult task is to be deliberate about designing practices and school structures which are aligned with, or congruent with, our values.


**Processes for developing practices which are congruent, or aligned, with our values and beliefs**

One of the most powerful processes for breaking from the patterning of our past experiences is to examine practices for their congruence with our beliefs and values. Take for example the following statement of practice by a teacher:

> *"I continually provide information for students via notes on the board and handouts."*

What educational belief is congruent with that statement of action? One belief congruent with the action is that the teacher believes that teachers are the authorities and that it is their role to transmit information to the students. The question is then whether you actually hold the belief which is congruent with a particular practice. If not then the practice should be changed.

Some may well argue that it is not as simple as that. They may argue that they value meaningful learning and self-directed learning. But they may also value student achievement and argue that assessment in the senior years, and syllabi that are heavily content laden, demand that students get ready access to important information. If so what learning beliefs are being compromised in the process? Education is full of such tensions. It is an individual professional decision as to how we exercise our professional voice and how we balance our responsibilities to students for success in the short term against longer term educational benefits.

Just as we can examine our practices for congruence or alignment with our beliefs and values, we can deliberately and consciously design practices which are congruent with our values and beliefs. For example, there are many practices congruent with the belief that students can and do learn from each other. A teacher who holds that belief would develop approaches

that, in principle, give opportunities for students to learn from each other. So a teacher who holds this belief is likely, in practice, to arrange the room so that students can work together readily, to give opportunities to work together on tasks in small groups and to employ strategies and approaches such as peer modeling, peer evaluation and peer tutoring. The relationship between these particular learning-teaching practices and the teacher's core values and beliefs is shown in Figure 4.

Not only would practices be developed to give opportunities for students to learn from each other but also feedback loops would be introduced to evaluate whether in fact collaborative learning was actually occurring.
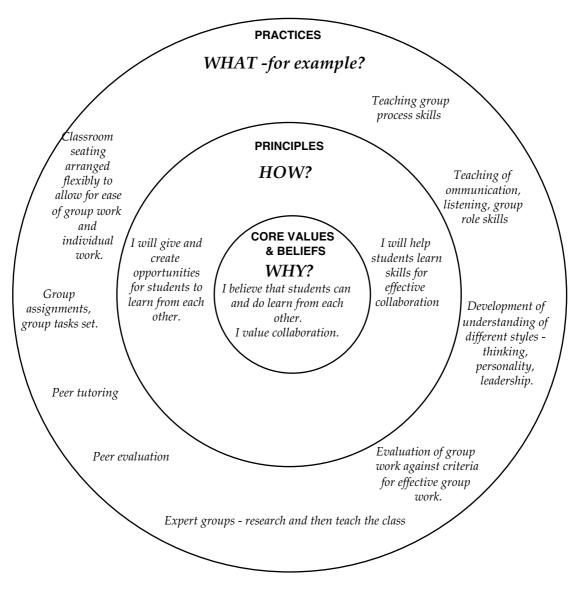
**PRACTICES**

*WHAT -for example?*

*Teaching group process skills*

*Classroom seating arranged flexibly to allow for ease of group work and individual work.*

**PRINCIPLES**

*HOW?*

*Teaching of ommunication, listening, group role skills*

*I will give and create opportunities for students to learn from each other.*

**CORE VALUES & BELIEFS**

*WHY?*

*I believe that students can and do learn from each other.*
*I value collaboration.*

*I will help students learn skills for effective collaboration*

*Group assignments, group tasks set.*

*Development of understanding of different styles - thinking, personality, leadership.*

*Peer tutoring*

*Peer evaluation*

*Evaluation of group work against criteria for effective group work.*

*Expert groups - research and then teach the class*

**Figure 4          Practices derived from core values and beliefs**

A useful exercise to develop the habit of this approach and thinking is set out in Figure 5.   As a reflection exercise, work it through individually or in collaboration with a colleague.

# EXERCISE FOR DEVELOPING CONGRUENCE BETWEEN BELIEFS AND ACTIONS.

*Working with a partner. . .*

1. Each identify one of your strongly held values or beliefs about learning.

2. If you believe this, *how in principle* do you respond?  How, *in principle*, do you work towards this  belief?

3. Give three examples of *different practices* which are congruent with this principle and its underlying belief.

4. Identify *barriers*  (or potential barriers) to this belief being lived out in practice.

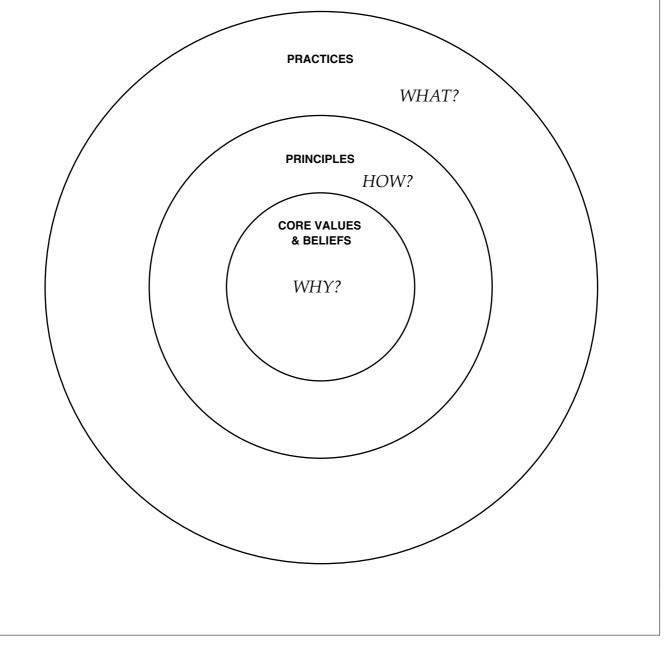5. Identify a practice which is *not congruent* with your belief.

**PRACTICES**

*WHAT?*

**PRINCIPLES**

*HOW?*

**CORE VALUES & BELIEFS**

*WHY?*

**Figure 5      Developing practices congruent with values and beliefs**

## Becoming education architects - designing schools for learning

Adopting a values and beliefs driven approach is like becoming an *education architect* as opposed to a protector of heritage buildings. This metaphor has its limitations, as I believe the nature of education is far more fluid, dynamic and organic than the nature of a building. However, the metaphor is useful in so far as it encourages us to look at what is involved in architectural design. The design of any building reflects:

1     the values and vision of the architect

2     the purpose for which the building is designed - which most likely reflects the values and vision of the person who commissioned the design

3     engineering and construction principles, and

4     the environment and context of the building.

In becoming education architects and designing and re-designing schools for learning we need to attend to similar influences on design:

•     values and vision

•     purpose

•     principles of learning, and

•     the environment and context.

In the early part of this paper I have explored ways and means of identifying, articulating and clarifying values and vision, of aligning practices with values and beliefs and of examining our practices for their underlying values and beliefs. It remains to outline the influence of context and environment on educational design and to articulate key principles of effective learning which are as critical to sound educational design as construction and engineering principles are to sound building design.

## Schools for Learning

You might ask "Aren't schools all for learning? Haven't they always been?". The answer is they have always been about 'learning for some' but not 'learning for all'. In the early part of this century the nature of the distribution of human work was such that learning for all would have meant that many people were over-educated for the work available. Consequently schools designed then were not intended for learning for all. Rather they tended to act as filtering and sorting systems selecting and holding on to those who were naturally effective learners in a school context – those who, in many ways, learned in spite of the teachers, in spite of the system. Little attention was paid to designing educational practices to support and enable all students to learn.

In fact education in the early part of the century was designed to exclude. The impact of this legacy is still being experienced in schools. It takes quite a shift in mindset for schools to move from an approach and an attitude that expects many students to fail or do poorly to one which expects most students to succeed. If your expectation is that all or most students will succeed you will act in a way to ensure most people succeed. If someone is not progressing you will turn your attention to making sure that they do

succeed. If your expectation is that only the minority will succeed, you will not put effort in when some students aren't succeeding because you expect and accept that many will not succeed.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century the rapid growth in knowledge, the rate at which is replacing unskilled labour and the accelerating pace of change mean that all students need to learn and to learn to learn. Our responsibility, now, is to ensure that most students succeed in learning. Thus, a 'school for learning' at the end of the twentieth century has a very different focus from a 'school for learning' at the end of the nineteenth century.

Using the architectural metaphor, schools are built on shifting sand and their vision and purpose has moved over time, especially in respect to the element of their purpose which is about learning to be a productive members of society. Is there any solid ground? The rhetoric of schools' literature continually claims that they "aim to foster the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural and physical dimensions of each learner's life." It seems to me these more essential aspects of the vision and purpose of school's do not shift. Despite differences, certain aspects of a school's vision in the 1990's are thus likely to be the same as in the 1890's school vision.

### Features of a School for Learning

Here we find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma! In the early part of this paper I have argued that we need to turn our focus from practice to vision, values and purpose – thus implying that it is not appropriate to describe the features of a school for learning in terms of the educational practices of the school.

In the previous section I have argued that changes in society and human life and work over time bring elements of difference in purpose for schools. So how can the features of a school for learning be described? Will not stating features of a school for learning tend to set these features in inflexible concrete?

The features of a school for learning can most appropriately be described in terms of processes. The most critical feature of a school for learning will be that the staff (including management) are learning. There will never be a set of immutable 'right' practices. For the moment, however, a learning teacher, a learning school, will be able to identify their vision and purpose and what values and beliefs are the basis for particular practices. They will be engaged in reflecting upon how particular practices help them achieve what they value and believe. In addition, their vision, values and beliefs will be continually revisited and refined.

### A School for Learning in the 1990's

Given changing times and contexts *a learning school of the 90's will be grappling with the tensions between old and new paradigms of education*. One way of representing the old and new paradigms of education is captured in Table 3.

| ASPECT | CONVENTIONAL APPROACH | LEARNING FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ERA |
|---|---|---|
| **Topic** | Imposed | Negotiated |
| **Mistakes** | Should not be made | To be learned from |
| **Assessment** | Exams | Authentic – various modes |
| **View of World** | Right - wrong | Uncertainty / shades of grey |
| **Determined by** | Central authority | Local needs in context of general/global framework |
| **Staffed by** | Subject expert | Cross curricula team |
| **Aim** | Theory to practice | Practice to theory & theory to practice |
| **Approach** | Content driven | Process & content driven |
| **Focus** | Teaching centred | Learning centred |
| **Teacher role** | Expert | Fellow learner / facilitator/sometimes expert |
| **Emphasis** | Knowing that | Knowing how & why and how to find out |
| **Student activity** | Working alone | Working collaboratively and alone – independence and interdependence |
| **Ethos** | Competitive against others | Striving for personal best against criteria & standards |
| **Student role** | Passive/receptive | Active/generative metacognitive, reflective |
| **Learning experiences** | Programmed | Flexible/opportunity guided by framework of outcomes and learners' interests/needs |

*Adapted from sources: Colin Ball, Kevin Richardson, Peter Ellyard*

**Table 3    Learning for 21C as opposed to learning for 20C**

As another interactive exercise:

- reflect on the context of the late 1990's
- take a moment to read the Table 3
- consider your own educational values and beliefs
- where do you think the emphasis in education at this point in time should be?

Having involved many educators in reflecting on Table 3 my experience is that schools of the 90's are grappling with the tension of developing something new while attempting to keep the best of the old.

*Education is a complex process demanding complex responses. The solutions to complex problems are not black or white. Rather than expecting that a definitive answer or solution be found, problem solving and design in education must be dynamic, fluid and flexible. The answers do not lie in 'either-or'; rather they can be found in 'both-and'.* The challenge in the 90's is to embrace the complexity and learn to live with paradox.

What are the principles of effective learning which help us navigate our way through the complexity? What are the laws or principles of learning that can act as a compass as we attempt to design schools which are about 'learning for all'?

## Principles of effective learning & teaching

In two previous seminar series papers, No 22 and 34 – *How Students Learn: a Framework for Effective teaching Part 1: Thinking Critical for Learning* and *Part 2: Conditions which Enhance and Maximise Learning*, I developed what I call a 'theory of learning from the chalkface'. This framework for effective teaching has been synthesised from the shared experiences of thousands of learners and educators and enriched by understanding from neuroscience, epistemology and education research.

The following principles are derived from the framework as developed in the two papers mentioned above. These principles are fundamental to sound educational design and they have implications for practices and actions. I have reluctantly spelled out some practices which are congruent with the beliefs and principles, however my hope is that you will critically reflect on the beliefs ad principles, explore further where there is lack of clarity or concern. Further, my hope is that with your own statement of beliefs and values you will work them through the process as described in Figures 4 and 5 .

## Beliefs - principles - congruent practices

**Belief 1:** **In a climate of trust and mutual respect, humans inspire and encourage each other.**

**Principle:** *Express unconditional acceptance, love and have an expectation that all students will learn*

**Practices:** In practice this means putting a *focus on relationships* and the quality of those relationships. At a personal level it means being a 'warm demander', it means balancing 'care' and 'expectation' – it means having clear expectations and communicating these to each other – students to teachers, teachers to students, teachers to management, management to teachers, parents to school, school to parents.

It means creating and designing *structures* in schools in which authentic personal relationships can develop. Large groups of people work against quality relationships. Spreading teachers' time over a large number of students, as often happens in secondary schools, works against quality relationships.

The movement towards the practice of working in teams in secondary schools (teams of teachers working with a team (class) of students) honours this principle as does the breaking down of large schools into sub-schools.

And, as we embrace the potential of information technology to enhance human learning, it means we will be ever *mindful of the potential of technology to dehumanise.*

**Belief 2:** **Humans move towards experiences from which they gain a sense of self worth and achievement.**

**Principle:** *Ensure a focus on gaining a sense of achievement for all.*

**Practices:** Determine readiness
Set challenging but achievable tasks for each learner
Mistakes seen as part of learning
Regular feedback which emphasises the positive and gives constructive and specific suggestions for improvement
Criterion based assessment, profile reporting
Flexible curriculum structures which allow for progression on readiness

**Belief 3:**  **Learner driven learning is more likely to be effective and meaningful**

**Principle:**  *Maintain ownership by the learner, nurture a sense of agency and tap intrinsic motivation*

**Practices:**  Connecting with students' experiential knowledge, their personal story knowledge.
Finding out what students know, what they want to know, how they want to learn and letting it influence your design
Learning experiences which have been designed with open ended aspects
Negotiating the curriculum - at a *micro* level in your classroom but also at the *macro* level by unitising the curriculum and giving students the opportunity to plan their own curriculum with parent and teacher guidance
Giving choice


**Belief 4:**  **Learning is constructing and reconstructing meaning from our experiences.**

**Principle:**  *Honour learning as personal meaning making*

**Practices:**  Modelling being a 'learner' not a 'knower'
Exploring and manipulating concrete materials
Exploring real life situations
Exploring issues that are student issues
Designing experiences which challenge student views of the world
Working from practice to theory
Involving students in coming up with patterns and rules rather than imposing or simply stating them.
Encouraging learning from mistakes
Develop knowledge and understanding by building on what is known
Metacognition – reflecting on learning, thinking and teaching processes
Critical reflection on knowledge and actions of self and others
Time given to explore, discover, debate, question, design, practise

**Belief 5:**      The human brain-mind-body system is capable of multiple ways of knowing. 'Knowing' is deepened and amplified when there is an integration of our ways of knowing.

**Principle:**      *Design learning experiences to integrate our many ways of knowing*

**Practices:**      The Integral Learning model developed in the first of the two previous seminar papers (Atkin 1993) essentially describes a process for designing learning experiences to stimulate and integrate our many ways of knowing – to integrate experience, feelings, imagination, information and action. At a micro level it means integrating emotion, movement, image and sound.
Practices which encourage expression of learning in a variety of ways - dance, drama, song, story, cartoon, poster, metaphor, essay, debate, theory, procedures – honour multiple ways of knowing.

**Belief 6:**      Human psychic drives differ in different life phases

**Principle :**      *Match the nature of the learning experiences to the primary psychic task of the learners' lifespace*

**Practice:**      Curricula focussed on the primary psychic task for the age group:
Infancy:   trust and belonging
Childhood:     competence and playfulness
Early adolescence:   identity
Young adulthood:   intimacy vs isolation
Mid adulthood:     stagnation vs generativity
Middle school programs designed around knowing self
Teacher profesional development programs designed around opportunities for fresh starts, new areas in mid adulthood help the stagnation vs generativity (commonly known as mid-life crisis).

## Summary

A conventional conclusion would sum up the major points and offer some inspiring words. It is fitting in this paper that I turn the summarising back to you and ask you to reflect on your own organisation in terms of the key questions and challenges posed:

## Reflection

- **What is the reality in your organisation?**
  To what extent is it practice or action driven?
  To what extent is it values/principles driven?
  To what extent is our practice unconscious and less than deliberate?
  To what extent is our practice patterned by the past?

- **HOW do you improve?**
  Given the current reality, what do you need to do to improve your practice to bring it to be values/principles driven?
  Do you need to:
  - **clarify** values and beliefs
  - work towards **congruence** between our values/beliefs and our practices
  - continually **revisit** our values/beliefs to refine and verify their validity
  - continually look for the **'why'** behind our practices
  - ensure feedback loops and evaluation strategies are in place to provide a commentary on how well your practices are helping you achieve what you value and believe

Good luck!

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