

9/3/09

Changes to the NZ Curriculum require a fundamental change to the way we teach.

Through these newsletters and school planning information statements we have been communicating the changes to the New Zealand curriculum and how our school proposes to embrace these.

The key change is based not so much on content, but more in understanding how to grasp content. In the past, schools have relied heavily on teaching informational content, enhanced with developing cognitive skills to aid comprehension and the grasping of core language, mathematical and science concepts.

The new curriculum recognises that in order for children to grasp concepts and be continually successful in their learning, they require a set of 'key competencies' and core values.

As a reminder these competencies are:

- 1 Managing oneself
- 2 Relating to others
- 3 Participating and contributing
- 4 Thinking
- 5 Being competent users of language, symbols and text

Our parents already understand that Elmwood Normal School is implementing its own interpretation of what the school believes is needed. Our implementation strategy is progressive and is based on a learning framework created by the staff during 2008. Our direction encompasses a vision that young people will be confident, connected, actively involved, and life-long learners.

In 2009 our teachers are being challenged to design programmes that will empower children to learn and inspire them to achieve personal excellence regardless of their individual circumstances. The senior management team has provided direction to teachers on teaching the children how to reflect on their own learning, how to determine how best they can learn and how to become future focused learners. Students will be encouraged to value excellence, inquiry and innovation, cultural diversity, fairness and social justice, a sense of community, their environment and the components of integrity. It is expected that this focus will help the children learn about their own values and respect the values of others in order to enrich our communities for the common good of all.

This year parents should be hearing our teachers consistently relating to 'key competencies' and can expect some quality feedback on our implementation progress. The last thing we want is for our 'key competencies' focus to be too complex or mysterious to understand, however they do represent a change in focus in the NZ curriculum and therefore in our programme delivery strategy. Critical to our success is the understanding that the competencies are interconnected sets of actions, behaviours and choices that children make and do.

An example of seeing the development of these competencies working is in the development of strong learning habits - habits that will maintain a focused desire in the children themselves to take their learning further and beyond. These habits require an intelligent behavioural approach. Behaving intelligently requires a child to stick to the task, be given the time to complete the task and have the perseverance to get it completed. It's all about reinforcing the *learning habits* that trigger the child's desire to be an achiever.

I am hoping that we will approach the curriculum changes with a realisation that it will take enlightened teaching and delivery strategies to make the differences we are seeking within our vision for the future. This requires a holistic approach that is not stifled in any way by unsatisfactory and inappropriate teaching methods. The competencies we refer to must not be seen in isolation and are the core of our teaching alignments with the child's intrinsic motivation, imagination, curiosity and creativity.

My appeal to the teachers is not to get bogged down on paper work, but to spend their valuable time on the real deal – **the craft of teaching!** Engaging the learner in learning requires a fresh look at how teachers can effectively give the learners the space they need to arouse their minds to learn. Our vision for success is set for realistic and relevant teaching that offers innovative approaches towards quality learning. The time spent on creating quality teaching and learning will be more important than the time spent on testing and measuring. Whilst not wanting to underestimate the importance of assessment, I believe the time given to a child's thirst for exploring new learning horizons will make the biggest difference.

Kevin Gooch
Principal

