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The Newsletter of the IDES Network

## network

## Making Connections Conference Edition



Jim Dunbar with Chris McIlroy and Margo Williamson

### From the Chair

On behalf of the IDES Management Committee, I would like to thank all those involved for making our 2007 conference, 'Making Connections Through A Curriculum for Excellence', such a great success.

The IDES Network was established in 1988, exploring and sharing 'way out' educational ideas like enterprise, creativity and thinking skills! These notions were researched across all sectors of education in Scotland and abroad – not in a detached, academic way, but by seeking out what was happening in schools. The research resulted in publications like *Creativity Counts*, which lay the foundations of a new realisation – that the 'how' of teaching is just as important as the 'what'.

*A Curriculum for Excellence* puts the skills and capacities engendered by the 'how' of teaching at the centre of everything we do and is taking steps to prepare our young people for a changing world. Both of our conference keynote speakers emphasised the importance of empowering teachers to encourage the growth of Curriculum for Excellence from the grass roots. The conference demonstrated that there is no shortage of good practice out there, and its vast oversubscription tells us that lots of teachers are keen to learn from each other. If this is how Curriculum for Excellence is to develop, then the future is certainly bright. As teachers we are also learners and I believe that our conference has shown that teachers from all sectors can enjoy learning together. The green shoots of a fresh and exciting approach to a 21st century curriculum are clearly evident.

**Jim Dunbar**  
Chair, The IDES Network

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# Creative learners for life

**Margo Williamson, Curriculum for Excellence Programme Director, Learning and Teaching Scotland**

Whilst preparing for this presentation, I was delighted to find that Curriculum for Excellence and IDES share many objectives and ways of operating. They are both working towards a more challenging, flexible and integrated curriculum, one which is creative, enterprising and relevant to young people. They both encourage the identification and sharing of good practice, and see networking and the exchange of information and ideas as important processes to assist change.

## What has been happening with Curriculum for Excellence?

Engagement with the profession across all local authorities is currently taking place. Toolkits are available on the web for schools to use as they look at what they are currently doing.

Plans are in place for reporting progress on curriculum outcomes and experiences throughout the coming months.

In March, a series of seminars is taking place across Scotland to look at 'Science: Planet Earth' and 'Curriculum Architecture'. Staff from across all sectors and a range of subject areas have been invited to participate. Next session, cross-cutting outcomes on numeracy and literacy will be issued, with the outcomes and experiences of the remaining curricular areas following not far behind. Then, also during the 2007/8 session, further attention will be given to developments in assessment and qualifications, reflection of progress to-date, and engagement activities on draft outcomes, experiences and curriculum architecture.



## What are the implications?

There are particular implications for the role of the teacher. Curriculum for Excellence is shifting the focus away from a prescriptive curriculum, giving more scope for professional judgement and creativity. There are also implications for leadership – by which we do not just mean senior managers; the leadership role of every teacher will be enhanced. Support will be provided for professional dialogue and debate – teachers need the opportunity to discuss and think through what all of these changes mean, from the principles through to collaborative working.

The most exciting implication of Curriculum for Excellence is that schools will have further opportunities for creative teaching and learning. We want all of you to get involved – to be creative teachers, developing creative environments for learning, in which young people can become creative learners for life.



# Learning: You're in for a treat!

Chris McIlroy, HM Inspectorate of Education

When early years pupils are simulating the action of a washing machine, enthusiastically swirling clothes in a bucket of soapy water whilst talking about what's happening, which part of the curriculum are they involved in – science, technology, language? And does it matter to the children? What does matter is the connections that are being made, in this case between learning at home and learning at school, and between the experiences the children are having and their understanding of them. Children and young people need to understand the purposes of learning to keep them motivated, interested and engaged. Children begin their schooling full of curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and it is our role to maintain this, whilst challenging them and helping them to progress towards independent learning.

*A Curriculum for Excellence* states that the curriculum should enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Graham Donaldson HM Senior Chief Inspector of Education wrote in *Improving Scottish Education* that 'Scottish education does many things well and some things particularly well'. However, you need to consider not only what you do well already, but how you would improve the curriculum in your school.

HMIE is already seeing signs of development in schools as a result of Curriculum for Excellence thinking. We have witnessed:

- more emphasis on active learning in P1
- some primary schools making very good use of curriculum flexibility
- more examples of well-planned inter-disciplinary studies, and more opportunities for in-depth study, in primary and secondary schools
- some very good examples of skills for work.

We have found good practice in connected learning in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, creativity, enterprise, citizenship and sustainable development education – often with overlaps between them – and in inter-disciplinary studies, both planned by teachers and those where young people take more of a leading role.

## Literacy and numeracy

All areas of the curriculum use language in teaching and learning and many use mathematics. These provide rich contexts for learning and for developing and applying literacy and numeracy.

## Creativity, enterprise, citizenship and sustainable development education

Learners can express their own ideas and views and be challenged to use creativity in real life contexts. They can address ethical issues and engage practically in responsible



citizenship and learning about the world. They can also develop skills in thinking, problem solving, and working independently and with others.

## Inter-disciplinary studies planned by teachers

From pre- to post-school, learners benefit from progressive development of ideas and skills within 'disciplines'. But learning doesn't always fit into subject compartments – some of the best learning crosses boundaries. However, the individual subjects need to be well taught, to provide a strong foundation on which connections can be made, and it is important not to pile in too many disparate subjects within a topic – more isn't necessarily better.

## Personalisation and choice

Young people can benefit by taking more of a leading role in personal projects, research or thematic studies, which follow a line of enquiry or the learner's own interests. Direction can also be negotiated with a group of learners, such as in some storyline approaches. Where learners influence the direction of study, it is important to think about progression and coherence to ensure the process will work well.

## Evaluations of innovation

You don't need to wait to see the whole Curriculum for Excellence picture before you begin to implement your own school's ideas for curriculum change. HMIE, as a partner in Curriculum for Excellence, is encouraging 'well thought-out' innovation. We need to remember that the 'guinea pigs' in this process are our young people. The benefits to the learners must be the key consideration in any development. Is there a convincing rationale for change? Has there been consultation with stakeholders, including parents and carers? What is the anticipated impact on pupils? And how will you know that it is working?

There are many benefits to learners of making connections. By being able to see the relevance of the curriculum, and where each element fits into the bigger picture, opportunities for reflection, and for combining efforts for greater understanding, can be grasped.

# Making Connections through Curriculum for Excellence

## Workshop summaries

At this year's IDES conference, seven schools showcased their projects and innovative initiatives on the broad theme of 'integrating the curriculum'. IDES has always taken the view that sharing and reflecting on effective practice is a most persuasive and genuine form of professional development. In the following pages of *Network*, read about what the schools discussed with delegates. More detailed information can be found on the IDES website.

***Presenters were 'passionate' about their work and in sharing their good practice.***

Conference delegate

***Excellent choices of speakers/workshops with something for everyone.***

Conference delegate

## Creating the enterprising school

**Martin Robertson, Auchinleck Academy**

In 1996, HMIE gave Auchinleck Academy in East Ayrshire a disappointing inspection report. There were concerns in a number of areas, including leadership, attainment, discipline, relationships with parents, quality assurance and pupil self-esteem and expectations. The newly appointed Head Teacher created a 'transformational agenda' to improve the school across the board, and a key element of that agenda was enterprise in education.

By 2004 the improvement in the school was clear for all to see, and Auchinleck was invited to take part in the HMIE pilot of new Quality Indicators for enterprise in education. The school carried out a full audit of enterprise provision, and produced a Standards and Quality Report on enterprise in education. The report identified a number of key issues – enterprise programmes were developed independently and lacked progression, and it was unclear who was responsible for enterprise at senior management and principal teacher level.

More improvements were made. A new Depute Head Teacher and three cross-curricular Principal Teacher posts were created with responsibility for enterprise in education. The school adopted an all-embracing approach to enterprise, focusing on a 'can do' culture and the promotion of enterprising learning and teaching. We moved from an improvement plan that included a section on enterprise in education, to a plan that is about enterprising learning, including Assessment is for Learning, cooperative and competitive learning. And all of the changes have created an enterprising school fit to develop young people with the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.



# Achieving excellence

**Susan Dyer and Ella Toon, Bankier Primary School**

Since 2002 at Bankier Primary near Falkirk we have been working on our 'Futures Thinking' – an evaluation of the structure and breadth of the curriculum and impact on achievement and attainment. Its fit with Curriculum for Excellence has given us a head start.

We examined the impact of 5–14 on the school and found that, though partly successful, it had failed to achieve the balance or coherence we would like, and for our teachers it had contributed to risen stress levels, low morale and reduced professionalism. We were losing out on freedom, depth and satisfaction – key aspects of motivation. In responding to Curriculum for Excellence, we needed to ensure we built on 5–14's successes.

We conducted extensive research and consulted all our stakeholders, and found that most people wanted a wide curriculum and priority areas.

As a result of our research and development, priority subjects are still taught prescriptively, but with a change in emphasis allowing flexibility. Too much deviation from the guidelines would destroy continuity and progression, so we've handled this with care. The teacher has discretion over which subjects to combine and when, but needs to justify decisions.

Our attainment has risen steadily and our pupils have wide ranging achievements across the curriculum. We found that to achieve excellence it is important to have strong leadership with clear vision, a culture of learning, an ethos of achievement and to meet the needs of stakeholders. It is also important to get the curriculum content and structure, staff training and development, behaviour management and the balance of freedom and accountability right.



# Integrating the secondary curriculum

**Steven Doogan, Dornoch Academy**

As part of Dornoch Academy's celebration of Highland Year of Culture 2007, we are implementing a project in which ICT is being used to link history, art, physical education and sciences. The separate departments have adopted a project based approach to integration, and are working together under an Eco Schools banner. Through the project, the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence have been embedded into the curriculum.



# Learning through play

**Lesley Graham and Vicki Blyth, Denbeath Primary School**

As P1 and P2 teachers at Denbeath Primary School in Fife, we were looking for ways to ease the transition between nursery and P1, and to develop play as a vehicle for learning. We are very enthusiastic about Curriculum for Excellence – it recognises the importance of play in the early years. Emphasising the importance of learning through play enabled us to build on the thinking skills, problem solving, learning to learn and self-confidence we were already striving to achieve.



To give the children more ownership of their play we introduced mind-mapping and the sharing of learning intentions, and focused on the development of questioning skills. We also felt that to assess and evaluate the learning within play effectively, it was vital to involve the children.



Through discussion each week, they are involved in creating 'We are learning to' cards, which are then displayed in play areas around the room. In P2, the children are encouraged to ask their own questions, which are also displayed. Every day, the children are involved in self and peer-assessment with their 'Think-Pair-Share buddies', and informal discussions of learning in their play areas. In P2 the children also give themselves 'two stars and a wish' as a weekly round-up. This fully embeds our formative assessment within active learning through play.

The children are now more engaged in their learning, and able to articulate what they are learning within the play areas to a much greater degree than we had thought possible. In turn, this has created a more enquiring and curious learning environment which challenges our children.

# An infusion of teaching and learning strategies

**Cathy Quinn and Anne McCallum, Sacred Heart RC Primary School**

At Sacred Heart Primary in Grangemouth we have been using various strategies to address the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence across the curriculum. We have already used a mixture of formative assessment, thinking skills and cooperative learning strategies to teach problem solving and writing, and this session we have moved on to reading.

Our staff have reported that the strategies are working very well in classrooms. Children enjoy the variety, and their skills in effective questioning, collaborative group work and self and peer-assessment are steadily improving. The children's ability to talk knowledgeably about these strategies was remarked on by a recent HMIE District Inspector.



We have also introduced 'teaching talking partners' at the school, and 'learning journals' for teachers to record their thoughts and reflections. Sacred Heart staff feel that they are benefiting from observing and discussing each other's lessons. This strategy has given teachers time to reflect on their own style and how they can learn, just as the children do, from each other.

# Grounds for learning

**Gordon MacDonald, Sir E Scott School and Lisa Mackenzie, Landscape Architect**

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Pupils at Sir E Scott School, Isle of Harris, have been working with a professional landscape architect to produce a 'masterplan' for the redevelopment of the school grounds. Our 'Grounds for Learning' project set out to design a place of learning as well as a place of recreation.

The idea arose when initial proposals for improving the school grounds within the Council's PPP project were disappointing. Our art teacher suggested that the school should try to get involved in the Executive's Future Learning and Teaching programme. With local authority support, our bid was successful.



Working with top quality design professionals and other agencies, we began to realise that the external environment of the school could be developed in ways that would improve not only its appearance and functionality, but also its capacity to support learning and to help develop positive attitudes towards the environment.

The redevelopment of our school grounds is yet to begin, but the project has already achieved success. Prospective contractors to the Council have been required 'to pay due regard' to the design masterplan which emerged from the collaboration of the pupils and Lisa.

Can projects like this deliver a valid learning experience? Undoubtedly! Even from the perspective of a conventional curricular model the project supported quality work in language, maths, PSE/citizenship, art and design, graphic communication, history, geography and science. Further analysis in relation to Curriculum for Excellence revealed the project's true strength with very clear and robust links to all four capacities.

# Building a learning community

**Andy Shanks, Montrose Academy**

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Five years ago, Montrose Academy in Angus embarked on an ambitious programme to address the issues that arose from the transition of pupils from P7 to S1. The basic philosophy of the programme was: if you want pupils to be successful at secondary school, show them how. A wide range of aims were developed, including equipping all S1 pupils with the skills needed to be successful, reversing the dip in attainment in S1 and S2 English, creating a sense of community amongst pupils, and fostering cooperative working amongst teachers by encouraging cross-curricular teaching and learning.



As a result of the programme, many changes have taken place with very positive outcomes. Amongst various improvements, all S1 pupils now undertake a four day introduction to the school, with all departments delivering a lesson that uses critical skills or cooperative learning approaches. New S1 pupils work together in their forms and as a year group to develop a code of conduct and a standard for writing, and to monitor their own progress during the year. Teachers meet in teams to discuss strategies for teaching, management and maintenance of classes.

We have built a learning community in which our learners know where they are, where they are going, and how they will get there. We also paved the way for the kind of thinking that underpins Curriculum for Excellence – and made a good start to its implementation.



*This has been the most valuable experience and satisfying event I have attended in some time.*

Conference delegate

*A very inspiring day – leaving lots of great ideas to take forward...*

Conference delegate



# IDES

## The IDES Network AGM

**Wednesday 6 June 2007 at 3.30 pm**  
**Learning and Teaching Scotland, Dundee**

All members are invited to attend the IDES AGM where you can hear more about future plans, support the Management Committee and have your say about the way forward. If you are planning to attend, or if you want to submit your apologies, please contact the Co-ordinator by e-mail, phone or fax (details below).

**Not a member?** Join the Network now and gain access to:

- a network of enthusiastic practitioners
- newsletters
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Membership costs £20 per year. Application forms and more information are available from:

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