

## Building Learning Communities

Human beings are fundamentally social creatures who generally learn best when working together in supportive environments.

Schools need to become 'personalised' in the broad sense of becoming more sensitive and responsive to individual difference. The individual learner will have a claim on the time and the assistance of both teacher and peers but has an obligation to make a positive contribution in return. Personalised learning is part of the process of establishing the school as a mutually-supportive community of learners.

*The curriculum should respond to individual needs and support particular aptitudes and talents. It should give each child increasing opportunities for exercising responsible personal choice as they move through their school career.*

A Curriculum for Excellence, Page 14,  
The Curriculum Review Group, 2004.

IDES has decided to promote some of the thinking and ideas first set out in a paper **Personalised Learning** developed by the Future Learning and Teaching (FLaT) reference group of Learning and Teaching Scotland. We wish to

acknowledge their work on that paper and are grateful for the opportunity to build on it. Key to these ideas are the following factors:

- environment for learning
- choice of learning and teaching approaches
- ways in which learning is organised.

The following expansions of these factors are possible criteria to assist planning projects in primary and in secondary schools which will be supported by IDES and provide the basis for a Conference in late 2008 to examine the progress of Scottish education towards schools as "mutually supportive communities of learning".

We would like to invite you to share examples of projects which exhibit some or all of these criteria.

IDES can provide a grant of up to £1000 towards the cost of projects and will consider all proposals received. We very much look forward to hearing from you and request that applications for project grants are submitted by January 11th 2008.

Jim Dunbar, Chairman, IDES Network

## How does your school's project develop some or all of these ideas?

### 1. The environment for learning

- are pupils genuinely helping to organise aspects of the school community?
- are they (through pupil councils, class discussion, etc) helping to shape school development plans?
- are parents part of the schooling process, with daily two-way communication between school and home through diary planners, a school website which facilitates learning, meetings which help and encourage parents to involve themselves in their child's learning?
- are teachers developing the school and each other in a characteristically team-based way?
- to what extent do the individual requirements and preferences of pupils and parents influence the school?
- how effective is the school's communications strategy in promoting understanding of these approaches?
- do all pupils and staff influence and modify their immediate surroundings through decoration and display?
- do displays celebrate personal and group achievements and aspirations?
- are initiatives such as Eco-School used to improve the school environment in sustainable ways?
- are the school grounds used as a resource through which pupils can make personal explorations of the natural world?
- are school buildings and grounds organised so as to promote inter-personal relationships?

### 2. The choice of learning and teaching approaches

- does the policy support the development of pedagogies which result in all pupils being actively and personally involved in their own learning and the learning of others?
- is there a dynamic and productive alliance for learning between pupils and teachers, and indeed between them and parents and the wider community?

- are certain types of knowledge recognised as having intrinsic worth, but is it also understood that this knowledge can be learnt in ways which promote the four capacities as a central entitlement for all pupils, as pupils contribute to and take responsibility for the development of others?
- are the approaches advocated in Assessment is for Learning fully integrated into the learning and teaching policy, allowing personal feedback about next steps?
- are pupils actively planning their own personal learning and development in ways which help them understand their role within the civil society of the school, by choosing strategies and targets which best help others as well as themselves?
- do all pupils receive the support they need in ways which empower them to be active partners in both learning and teaching?
- is there an ICT-rich environment which promotes rather than hinders inter-personal learning?
- do learning activities in and beyond the classroom encourage pupils to make a personal contribution to the school community?

### **3. The ways in which learning is organised**

- are there opportunities for teachers to work together, to learn from each other through shadowing, mentoring, team-teaching etc?
- are constructivist pedagogies explored and developed in practical ways (eg through such programmes as Cooperative Learning and Critical Skills)?
- is pupil feedback encouraged as part of the development process? are pupils sometimes used as trainers for teachers?
- are visits encouraged to colleagues in other areas of the school, and to other schools?
- does the school organise in-house staff development seminars with fellow teachers as trainers?
- is there a clearly focussed strategy for sending staff on courses specifically supportive of personalised learning?



[www.ides.org.uk](http://www.ides.org.uk)

The IDES Network website contains a wealth of network information, including on this initiative, Building Learning Communities.

Downloads:

- Copy of the paper on *Personalised Learning*.
- This flyer, should you wish to make more copies to distribute to colleagues.
- Application form for project grants.

Completed forms should be submitted by Friday January 11th 2008 to:

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