

# The Exchange

*Kay Dickson, Headteacher of Park Primary in Stranraer and Andy Johnstone, Head of Geography at Penicuik High School got together to share their thoughts with the Government on where schools are at on the CfE journey. We listened in as they compared notes of their own experiences.*

Kay I love CfE. It's so alive. So exciting! Gives us lots of opportunities for synthesis.

Andy The picture's incomplete but I'm not worried about that. We have the principles and that's what matters to get the ball rolling.

Kay Absolutely. It's the values – challenge, enjoyment, breadth and depth and so on that will deliver the outcomes.

Andy I've piloted a CfE-style project to apply for a John Muir Award. There are no extra resources for it but it's really working. I started with people I thought would be open – in art, CDT and English. Now every department is involved. We've got kids building bird boxes in CDT, in geography we're mapping them, they're writing poems in English, creating songs in music, working on compasses in maths, using the compasses for orienteering in PE. It all links and makes sense. We've links with Malawi who achieved the Award and I'd like to work with Native American Indians next.

Kay What a coincidence! We did a fantastic project working with First Nation people (that's their preferred term) looking at the similarities between our communities' traditional ways of life – fishing, farming, living off the land. It was a wonderful experience and we have a totem pole in our playground now. I can give you a contact for them! That kind of project is utterly in line with CfE. We're used to working on projects all the time and weaving in literacy, numeracy, wellbeing etc whatever the topic.

Andy Some colleagues' starting point is 'I don't have time/capacity', but it's just about doing things differently. It's all about planning and working together. Negotiating how we fit together is new though so we'll have to make the planning process slicker.

Kay We share all our planning with parents. Children take home mind maps of what they'll be doing over the term. They helped create them so they can explain them to parents – really critical for parents who can't read well themselves.

Andy We survey at parents nights using *Survey Monkey* online surveys that we can lead them through. They only take minutes and the system analyses all the data quickly and easily and generates graphs. Thanks to that we discovered that parents of our boys are

more negative than parents of girls because of the issues of under-achievement for boys.

Kay Send me a link for that survey! Making it easy is crucial. And I honestly think CfE *is* simple. Keep the child at the centre. That's it. *Assessment is for Learning* has made a difference over the last five years. Many boys just need a more active experience – and with AifL their needs are better met now.

Andy The John Muir Award means S1s could get a certificate by the end of the year. This will help with the issue of a dip in S1 and fits in looking at broader ways of assessing achievement.

Kay Our school community is on bar 12 of the 1-12 bars that measure deprivation. We have 60% unemployment and children born into three generations of unemployment. In that climate, where there are low aspirations, we've raised attainment from 43% to 85% over nine years. Those children have struggled when they hit secondary school and the focus moved from teaching the child to teaching the subject.

Andy We need to have better links with primary too to make the transition a more positive experience and avoid that S1 dip.

Kay I think there's fear factor around Outcomes. My team are looking for reassurance that this new freedom is real! They want to know that when HMIE visit, we'll be doing the right thing. I'm telling them to be confident. Ironic – that's what we're trying to develop in our children through CfE!

Andy It's exciting to see the standard of probationers coming out of teacher training now. Superb. CfE will be right up their street.

Kay The LTS website is fantastic in terms of hand holding for practitioners. Maybe that's the best way for us to keep in touch and make those links.

Andy Ultimately, what I teach hasn't changed. It's just a different way of working and with CfE, it all dovetails perfectly. The future's bright!