

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 12 SEPTEMBER 2006

LEADERSHIP SUMMER SCHOOL

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To describe a Leadership Summer School attended by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services, and to highlight its significance for practice in East Ayrshire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Executive Director of Educational and Social Services was invited by the Scottish Executive to attend a summer school, "Leadership for Large Scale Improvement". This was held at Harvard University, USA between 21 July and 1 August 2006. Attendance was fully funded by the Scottish Executive. Another five representatives from Scotland also attended.
- 2.2 The purpose of attendance was to produce a direct contribution to the development of educational leadership in Scotland.

3. THE SUMMER SCHOOL

- 3.1 Although mainly attended by delegates from the USA, there were also representatives from Argentina, Australia, China and Singapore. The summer school (described by the organisers as "an Institute") was focussed on school improvement and the leadership of this process. The Harvard Graduate School of Education is regarded as a leader in its field in the USA, and has a world profile.
- 3.2 There were in total 10 days of activity with a total of 47 hours in lectures. The course methodology consisted of pre-reading material, followed by a working day of lectures by university staff, themed tasks related to the lecture and then group discussions. The whole process was aimed at each delegate, or group, producing what was described as "A Theory of Action" that could significantly influence practice and produce improvements. No matter at what level, the "Theory of Action" in the Harvard view was to result in improvements in teaching and learning.

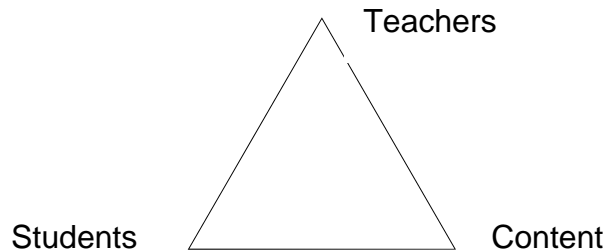
4. KEY CONTENT

- 4.1 The "Theory of Action" was further defined as being
- a) A causal statement: "If we do X, then we expect Y".
 - b) Phrased as a hypothesis that can be checked with data
 - c) Coherent with other ideas and plans

d) It is visible to the school and the community it serves

For the presentations this idea lies at the heart of real improvement at school, local authority or national level.

4.2 The “Theory of Action” is crucial at the Instructional Core:



For any improvement to have meaning it must be carried out at any one point of the triangle. Standards can basically be raised by improving teachers, raising content or empowering students. This model recognises that any change in one of the three corners of the triangle will impact on the other two corners.

4.3 The leader of the school, Professor Richard Elmore, went on to observe that accountability is central to a strong system. In the strongest schools, responsibility for learning and teaching, high expectations and accountability are completely coincident. When an external accountability system is applied to such a system it becomes stronger, in his view.

4.4 However, in Professor Elmore’s view, school or system improvement is not a process that develops in a straight line. Rather, improvement is reached by upward steps separated by periods of little apparent progress. By and large, this was reached by a progression from “Technical” change to “Cultural” change.

Technical Characteristics	Cultural Characteristics
Schedules	Beliefs about student learning
Structures	Knowledge of teaching
Roles	Norms for group work
Types of Professional Development	Discussion of practice
Protocols, Routines	Mutual accountability
Assessments	Distributed leadership
Accountability Systems	

Of these ideas, the concept of distributed leadership was the most powerful for Professor Elmore. (See Section 4.8 however).

4.5 The rigorous analysis of data was seen as essential in school improvement discussions. Although it is clear the USA is somewhat behind us in this area.

4.6 It was pointed out that in the area of special needs, behaviour interventions were far more likely to be effective earlier in a young person’s life than later. The success of integration strategies was related to social class in the USA.

Successful schools in special needs provision had high expectations and well established traditions of collaborative teaching. Provision should be part of “a universal design of schooling”, in other words it should be that seen as an integral part of overall provision.

- 4.7** The problems of immigrant children was explained in some depth. It is, however, clear that the USA has a totally different set of educational issues related to immigration, in terms of scale and depth, when compared to Scotland. The lessons being learned, however, in relation to immigrant children in the USA, were equally applicable to our disadvantaged young people and families.
- 4.8** A concept known as distributed leadership was being advocated. This analyses the levels to which decision making and managerial responsibility has been devolved, as against concentrated, within a particular post. While distributed leadership was widely regarded as “good” it was emphasised that this is a method of academic analysis rather than being an actual strategy.
- 4.9** The issue of parental involvement appears just as important in American schools as here in Scotland, and for the same reasons. It was argued with force that it was not enough to simply issue report cards or hold open evenings. Parents need to be welcomed actively, honoured and respected. A number of examples of how this might be achieved were suggested, these included:
- Telling parents what to ask at parents evenings
 - Organising social events for parents that include educational content
 - Being positive with parents who are challenging, and listening to them.
- It was argued that parental support for education is actually universal and independent of social class divisions, or race.
- 4.10** In terms of approach to delegated management of resources, Scotland’s systems are substantially in advance of most areas of the USA.
- 4.11** The main interpersonal challenges of leadership were explained in some detail with influential presentations on this topic. All emphasised that many difficulties can be resolved by being open in confronting difficulties, while in the process, always being willing to listen and take on new ideas.
- 4.12** The importance of active learning was given particular weight together with the need to tailor experiences to the needs of young people. Learning must be relevant, and teachers should, as a conscious part of planning, start from the perspective of adolescents and young people, in the Harvard view.
- 4.13** A presentation was given on how Miami Dade County had transformed provision interestingly, this was based in a vision that was almost identical to the Curriculum for Excellence, and its four capacities in Scotland. Many of the resources used in this, and other, examples of improvement were, however,

are unavailable at local level in Scotland since they involved legislative change at State level.

4.14 An in depth overview of leadership was given. This identified some key characteristics in an effective leader:

- An ability to convey difficult or unwelcome information
- The requirement for compassion
- The exercise of patience
- Being able to accommodate despair
- Maintenance of a strategic overview
- Planning for all eventualities
- Improved listening skills
- Work life balance

It was pointed out that no-one is fundamentally opposed to change. Opposition only comes with a perception of possible loss. Losses may be previewed in relatively abstract areas such as a person's sense of self worth, self respect, position or need to be valued.

5. DISCUSSION – IMPORTANCE FOR EAST AYRSHIRE

5.1 There was no marked divergence from present practice in East Ayrshire being advocated during this summer school. In particular, the "Theory for Action" approach is not significantly different from our Improvement Planning concept. However, the belief that all improvements should have a positive classroom impact is highly relevant. This is amplified with the explicit recognition that teachers, pupils and content are in a balanced relationship, since changes within one has implications for the others.

5.2 In terms of data analysis it is very clear that the USA is behind us. They have not really started in terms of audit, self evaluation and effective service monitoring. Schools, therefore also perform behind us in international studies.

5.3 For special needs all of the issues in the USA are found in Scotland. Their solutions therefore appear equally applicable. For the USA the way forward is in terms of high expectations, integrated approaches and particularly ensuring that children with special needs have the necessary independence to enter the adult world.

5.4 There is a need to keep learning and teaching at the centre of all activities. This must be kept under continued review both from the strategic perspective and how it is operating in the classroom. Learning in all contexts must be relevant to young people. Parental involvement and the recognition of the particular needs of groups in our community are vital.

5.5 Processes of leadership development are critical. This needs to operate at all levels. Leaders require to be supported by advisory and review processes. All staff should be regarded as leaders within the organisation, although each has a different role.

6. FINANCIAL/POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Nil

7. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The outcome from this summer school is central to the Improving Opportunities and Promoting Community Learning themes of the Community Plan.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that Elected Members:

- (i) ask that future relevant reports using the concepts from the Harvard Summer School be brought to Committee for consideration; and
- (ii) otherwise note the contents of this report

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GS/JW
3 August 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Executive Director of Educational and Social Services (576017)

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