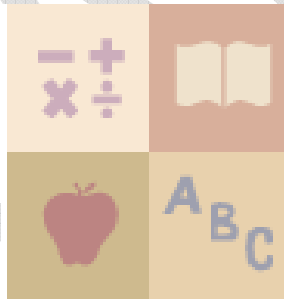




QUALITY CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS



PART 1

Ministry of Education

Belize, C.A.

To Educate! To Transform! To Liberate!

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FOREWORD

In 1992 the World Bank funded Belize Primary Education Development Project was launched. The project's components, according to J. Alexander Bennett (*Education in Belize: A Historical Perspective*, Belize City: The Angelus Press, 2008),

“were directed at making some inroads into improving a number of shortcomings which had been identified in previous reports, as those which were placing serious obstacles to the efforts to realize good to superior quality in the processes and the product of primary education in Belize.” (pp.193-194).

The components that were to be addressed included increasing the number of trained teachers, improving the quality of teacher education provided, improving school instructional leadership through the training of principals and strengthening curriculum development and application.

A subsidiary component of Belize Primary Education Development Project (BPEDP) was the conduct of research by a team of Ministry of Education personnel and project consultants in the last two years of the life of the project. The purpose of the research was to assess the impact of the project under the title of “Case Studies and Impact Evaluation”. A Synthesis Report of this research was produced in September, 1997.

Some of the findings of this report, produced after five years of the implementation of the BPEDP, are instructive.

- There was no notable difference in the effectiveness of teaching methods used by teachers who were trained under the original program of the Belize Teachers Training College and those trained under the revised program under the Project.
- Curriculum development efforts over five years of the BPEDP project were not successful because the efforts were not followed up by curriculum development and delivery at the school level.

The Case Studies and Impact Evaluation Report also identified some priorities that, in the view of the researchers, were significant enough to be pursued beyond the life of the BPEDP project. These were:

- Planning for Quality - Establishing a system which would enhance school effectiveness in the interrelated areas of teaching strategies, curriculum delivery, school leadership and organization, and safe and educationally effective school facilities and environment.
- Strengthening the quality and effectiveness of teacher training – including continuing professional development and in-service practice.
- The training of school leaders
- Ensuring that the National Curriculum should facilitate the “appropriate fostering of effective teaching strategies”.
- The development of the capacity of school leaders and teachers to prepare and administer effective school based testing and measurement.
- The training of School Managers to enhance their capacity to effectively manage schools so as to achieve quality in school organization, teaching effectiveness, and student achievement.
- The fostering of effective School and Community relations where the valuable contributions to the development of quality education could be made through greater involvement of parents and other community stakeholders in the life of the school.

Towards the end of the Belize Primary Education Development Project In 1997/1998, the Ministry of Education and Sports produced a comprehensive document: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN BELIZE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: Re-Structuring and Capacity-Building for Improved Access, Equity, Quality and Efficiency (February 2000) which formed the basis of a proposed Belize Education Sector Improvement Project (BESIP). While this project did not materialize, a World Bank summary (January, 2001) of the proposed initiative cited the objectives of the project as follows:

The BESIP objectives are:

1. to increase access and improve the equity and quality of service delivery in basic and secondary education;
2. to reform the public financing of education to ensure greater equity and cost-efficiency.

It is noteworthy that the summary document observed the following:

The GOB's education sector strategy document includes an assessment of its performance, and concludes that, at present, the goals for primary and secondary education have not been articulated in a way that motivates individual schools (notably private schools [*read grant-aided denominational schools*]) to pursue their mission of delivering improved quality and relevance of learning output. (Report No. PID8661, January 23, 2001)

The National Education Summit of May 2004 also led to the development of the Ministry of Education Plan of Action 2005-2010 with a detailed update produced in 2007. A review of these documents indicate that the identification of the issues and challenges that continue to confront the system of education in Belize reflect a clear understanding of the fundamental issues on the part of the Ministry of Education as well as many significant stakeholders. The persistence of many of the most fundamental issues – such as below average student performance on the Primary School Examination (PSE), persistent high repetition rates at the primary and secondary levels, low completion rates at the secondary level, and less than adequate performance at the secondary level Caribbean Examinations for a majority of the secondary students who are able to take the examinations – points to the significant failure to “motivate individual schools... to pursue their mission of delivering improved quality and relevance of learning output.”

I offer the preceding as the historical context in which the Ministry of Education proposes to introduce the Quality Schools Initiative in the year 2010. This document provides the roadmap to achieving quality education in our schools in Belize.

In the current year, 2010, our education system continues to languish, with 42.5% of our primary school teachers trained, 29.7% of our secondary teachers trained, and, with the exception of the Corozal and Orange Walk Districts, the average performance of our primary

school students in the Primary School Examination (PSE) remains at or below the national average. The national average performance of students on the examination has itself hovered at an unremarkable level for a number of years (Ministry of Education, Planning and Projects Unit, Education Statistics, 2008-09).

This document identifies the research based characteristics of quality schools and, after consultations with key stakeholders, places those in the context of the education system in Belize. The goal of the Quality Schools initiative is, in broad terms, to:

- Help schools maximize student success
- Build the capacity of schools and school systems to achieve excellence through high standards, quality assurance, and continuous improvement

Importantly, the planned approach to achieving quality schools is couched in the commitment of the Ministry of Education to work closely with schools, managements, and parents in order to develop and enhance the capacity of the school to *evaluate itself* against the characteristics and principles of the quality schools framework, to reflect on its own performance in the delivery of quality education, and to plan for itself the necessary interventions that would place the school on the road to success in achieving the level of quality performance desired.

This approach is a departure from past practices of introducing change strategies to schools in Belize by way of project driven initiatives, or by externally devised interventions that did not take root in the school system. It has been recognized that meaningful and sustainable change in the education system and in schools must be embraced, owned, and led by the schools themselves. In short, the goal of this initiative is to build the capacity of the school to change itself – to internalize the characteristics of quality schools and to constantly assess itself against the standards of these characteristics as a means to sustained self-improvement.

This process is depicted in the figure below.



Fig. i Quality Framework

As we set out on this journey to “improve the shortcomings which have been identified as serious obstacles to the efforts to realize good to superior quality in the processes and the product of primary education in Belize”, it is essential that the role of all stakeholders in the process is identified, acknowledged and accepted with vigour and commitment.

School managers, principals, teachers, parents, the Ministry of Education, and the larger school community must break the current cycle of practices that has mired the education system in the morass of under-performance and poor educational outcomes.

The Quality Schools Initiative offers an opportunity for change for the better – a change long overdue. The most significant change in this journey to quality schools must be the acceptance by all stakeholders of the education system who must fully accept individual and collective responsibility for the quality of our schools.

Christopher G. Aird
Chief Education Officer

INTRODUCTION

Any discussion on the definition of Quality Schools in Belize needs to take place within the context of the desired aim and function of education and a philosophical orientation which sees education as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for full personal development and for active participation in society.

This orientation is premised on the following three fundamental principles:

1. Ensuring that the learner learns how to learn and acquires the habitual capability for life-long learning;
2. Respecting the learner as an individual with his/her own uniqueness whether in terms of his/her learning differences or hopes and aspirations; and
3. Conscientising individuals who are able to live harmoniously in their communities and contribute productively to society.

Quality schools need to be characterized by those elements which are congruent with the desired aim, function and fundamental principles of education held by the communities they serve and are proponents of those policies and practices that help to support the achievement of the desired outcomes or products of education prescribed by these three fundamental principles.

Philosophical Orientation

Belize is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual society; the preservation of these unique features places great demands on the provision of education because our nation is cognizant of the richness these qualities afford us. Education is fundamental to the overall development of Belize and one of the greatest safeguards of the freedom of our people; it is the best guarantee of our spiritual, social, political, and economic well being.

The future of education in Belize demands a philosophy of education that emphasizes the need for the provision of education to be relevant, accessible, and equitable to each individual in the process of his/her schooling. Education in Belize must be prepared to meet the needs, and abilities of ALL our children. To this end, we believe that:

- Every child is entitled to an education that will prepare him/her for life-long learning, to be able to live harmoniously in his/her community and to actively participate in the development of Belize and in a changing global environment.
- Every child is unique and develops in his or her own way; each child is capable of learning and has the potential that should be developed to the maximum, and educators must build on this belief.
- Every child is respected as an individual with his/her learning differences, learning difficulties, hopes and aspirations.
- Every child is equally valued, regardless of race, gender, political affiliation, religious belief, ethnicity, cognitive and physical ability, and economic status.
- Every child shall be provided with curriculum which ensures that his or her cultural, ethnic, and gender needs are appropriately addressed.
- Every child is entitled to an education that labors to develop a spiritually, morally, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and ethnically grounded individual.
- Every child is entitled to provision of opportunities and programs which are adapted to their varying natural abilities and which allow children to develop their differing personal and socially useful talents so that they can achieve the highest possible standards.
- Every child is entitled to an education that results from a strong partnership between the school and all relevant stakeholders in a shared venture which involves management, parents, and students as well as state, church, businesses, and the wider community.
- Every child is entitled to the provision of opportunities for their holistic development through the fostering of national pride and global awareness, the developing of positive attitudes and good work ethics, the exemplifying and fostering of caring and supportive community values, and the nurturing and sustaining of our natural resources.
- Every child is entitled to an education provided by visionaries who embrace policies, programs, and practices that promote the holistic development of the child, recognizing that schools' operations are integrated and that they function as a whole so that classrooms are not isolated or disjointed entities

Every child has a right to a quality education, and everyone must do all that is possible to ensure this right.

- Every child is entitled to an education system served by professionals who are guided in educational operations by a set of professional ethics that are in alignment with enduring principles about education in general, its relationship to the development of the national community of Belize, and the global relationships in our world.

A Shared Vision

A shared philosophy, mission, and vision essentially speak to the issue of being in one accord; that is, being agreed on the purpose of why schools exist and who are the major clients, the goals of the schools, the direction that must be taken to achieve those goals, the policies and practices necessary to support the goals, and the commitment to collaborate in the achievement of the same. A shared philosophy, mission, and vision would be exemplified by the following:

We envision a National School System:

- Where every student in every school is held to high expectations and provided the tools to achieve those expectations.
- Where hard work is encouraged, achievement is rewarded, and national standards are maintained.
- Where a challenging curriculum, excellent teaching, and a rigorous national assessment system ensure that every student has the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for living in harmony with others and with their environment, and for further study.
- Where every teacher in every school is committed to their personal and professional improvement and their social responsibility to the community in which they serve.
- Where principals and teachers get the help they need to create a culture of planning, so that each school will have the opportunity and autonomy to develop, implement, and self monitor school improvement plans that are in consonance with their individual needs, the

The vision for Belize's National School System has implications for every student, every teacher, the curriculum, principals, government officials and other members of the wider community

Handbook Of Policies And Procedures For School Services, and other policies of their Managing Authority, the Ministry of Education and the Government of Belize.

- Where government officials, church leaders, educators, students, parents, and members of the larger community, are committed to excellence, equity, and lifelong learning for themselves as well as for all students.



DRAFT

WHAT CHARACTERIZES A QUALITY SCHOOL?

A quality school prepares all students to succeed; it promotes the harmonious development of the spiritual, mental, physical, social, and emotional well-being of students thereby contributing to their full personal development and to citizenship. The school is seen as a learning community where students are healthy, well nourished, ready to participate and learn, and are supported in learning by their families and communities. A quality school is a place where students are growing and are in high spirits.

Students are happy and are able to optimize their learning in a child friendly atmosphere - the kind of classroom environment where teachers value fun and laughter and make the student-life joyous. The environment must be one where teachers are positive and inspire confidence; where students understand that it is essential to establish ground rules of classroom conduct and behavior that is conducive to thinking and studying and the open sharing of ideas. Teachers must create an emotionally safe and secure learning environment to help students do their best learning.

Developing an emotionally safe classroom is important as it might be the only place where many students feel safe; one of the keys to creating this environment is treating each student with respect and care. Teachers must embrace diversity and show an enthusiasm for their subject and help students discover a passion for learning. Teachers must guide students toward reasonable personal goals and support them in their efforts to become whatever they are capable of becoming. Such a learning system helps students develop new skills and in addition, helps them become leaders.

The Ministry of Education has identified the following as essential dimensions of Quality Schools and anticipates that all schools should strive to attain the highest level of performance or outcome which is possible within each of the seven key characteristics:

*Some schools
may already
have some of
the **key**
characteristics
of*

Quality.

Does yours?

*How can
you tell?*

1. School Governance and Identity
2. Effective Leadership
3. Teacher Competence and Commitment
4. Delivery of the Curriculum
5. Safe, Healthy and Supportive Learning Community
6. School - Community Relationships
7. Quality Assurance

DRAFT

School Governance and Identity

Quality Schools have an identity. They know who they are and what they stand for, and they are able to project this to the community through their vision, mission, and the way they are governed. Quality schools engage in the development of a strong and clear school

culture because this is important for the success and vitality of the institution and the corresponding student success.

Importantly, a school culture or school identity is not an abstract concept, but it is a public expression. It is an articulated identity; visions, mission statements, slogans, logos, defining statements of purpose and other elements used to identify the schools are visible, easily understood and are reflected in the everyday actions that take place in quality schools. It is seen in the way school grounds and buildings are kept, students are taught and teachers are supported.

*Vision is what the future looks like because of what you do **best** everyday*

What is the vision for your school?

What are you doing to make it happen?

How is your school governed?

*How do people **react** when your school is mentioned?*

Quality schools' vision and mission are developed by managements, administrations, teachers, parents and other stakeholders working together. The input of all these parties allows for a broader and collective approach to what schools are to be and do, and provides direction for what happens on a daily basis. The vision and mission of quality schools are reflected on regularly during a school semester or term and at the end of the school year. Continuous reflection is critical in ensuring that the goal is being met.

Vision and mission and their corresponding goals are not unreachable dreams, but instead, practical targets that can and should be reached in a given timeframe. They can also be reviewed and changed if the need arises. Vision and mission are useful ONLY if they are used; if these are simply words on a poster in a school office, they are worthless.

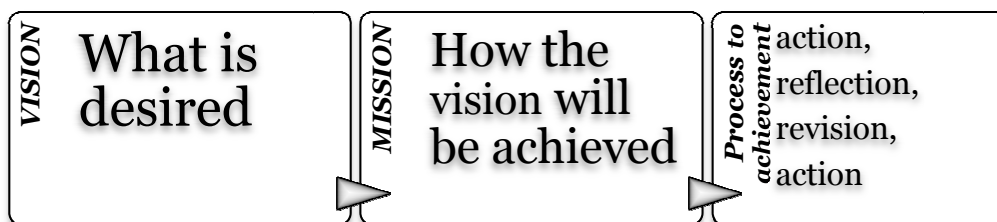


Figure. 1. The process of Vision and Mission

Vision and mission are reference points, reminders of why we do what we do

A quality school's identity cannot be determined and manifested without the foresight for effective school governance. This critical component of effective quality schools ensures that meaningful dialogue among all administration, teaching and support staff takes place regularly. How the school is governed is manifested through the approach to teaching and learning, the agreed standards for conduct and behavior, as well as the expectations for excellence that are shared and supported. The school's policies are aligned with its vision and mission and enable effective achievement of related goals. Its practices are therefore congruent with its policies; its rules and regulations are fair, just, and equitably applied. In quality schools, effective school governance is the responsibility of all persons – the school's management, administration, teachers, and support staff; the shared outlook for the success of the school and the relevant activities and resources to support that outlook make it possible for the running of a quality school to be a shared effort and the results are shared successes.

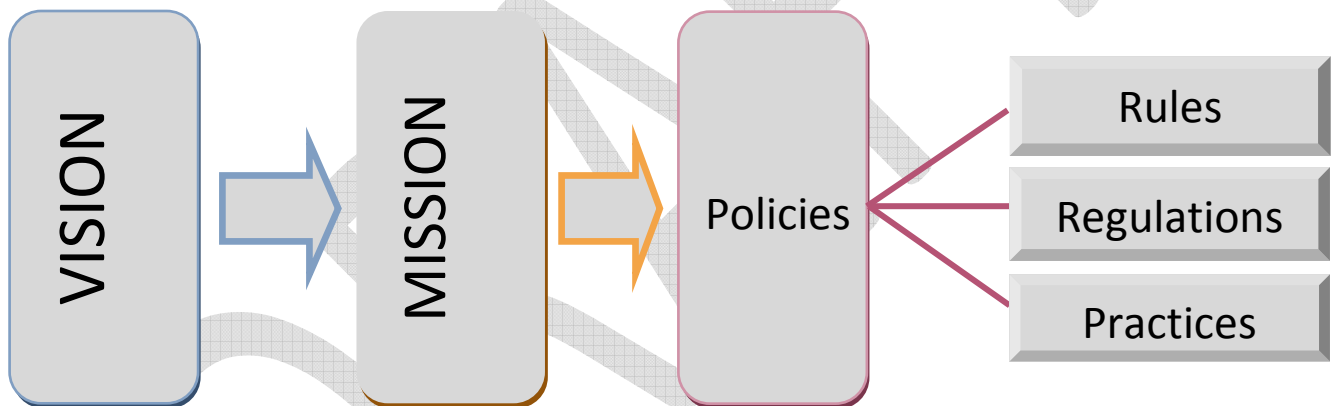


Figure. 2. The alignment of vision and mission with school polices

Effective Leadership

*To know what to do is wisdom.
To know how to do it is skill.
To know when to do it is judgment.
To strive to do it best is dedication.
To do for the benefit of others is service.
To want to help others is compassion.
To do it quietly is humility.
To get the job done is achievement.
To get others to do all of the above is leadership.*

– *Author Unknown*

In today's ever changing school environment, the need for strong school leadership cannot be over emphasized. Research has demonstrated a close link between school leadership and school effectiveness. An understanding of what constitutes strong and effective leadership is, therefore, essential for the efficient and effective management and operation of schools in the 21st century. Strong and effective leadership is especially essential to cope with the more complex and uncertain

educational goals, higher demands and expectations from parents and the general public, varied needs of a diverse student population, and for better school accountability to parents and the community.

Effective school leaders in quality schools promote effective teaching and meaningful learning by:

- developing with others a vision of learning for the school, motivating others to embrace the vision, developing strategic plans to implement the vision, and exercising leadership processes to realize the vision
- promoting a positive, learner-centered school culture, designing appropriate curricula and effective instructional programs, applying best practices to students' holistic education and assessment, and identifying, implementing, and maintaining quality teacher and student support services
- acting in an ethical manner with integrity, compassion and fairness
- being a reflective practitioner

Are you an Effective Leader?

Are you

Energetic

Enthusiastic

Passionate

Committed

Motivating

Accountable

Responsible

Prepared

Whom do you serve?

Why do you serve?

HOW do you serve?

- using appropriate interpersonal skills and effective communication
- being an advocate for schools and students
- developing a comprehensive faculty professional development plan aimed at improving teacher performance and enhancing students' holistic development
- applying management processes and procedures to improve the institution by implementing operational plans, managing records and resources (financial, human, and environmental) in a manner that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
- collaborating with families, engaging in effective community relations, promoting and responding to diverse community groups and interests, and
- mobilizing community resources to ensure that schools are beneficiaries of what is available by way of support, opportunities, and guidance.

<http://www.fieldstonealliance.org>,

Teacher Competence and Commitment

Are you a CARING teacher?

Competent and creative

Articulate and approachable

Reflective and respectful

Intelligent and inspiring

Nurturing

Goal-oriented and

Guided by ethical standards

*How well do these qualities describe **you?***

“Every Belizean teacher—CARING for our nations’ children” describes the qualities we envision in Belizean teachers across all levels. The acronym C.A.R.I.N.G spells out these qualities—competent and creative; articulate and approachable; reflective and respectful; intelligent and inspiring; nurturing, goal-oriented and guided by ethical standards. They engage in continuous professional development and research to equip themselves to strengthen the teaching learning process.

Competent and creative teachers are knowledgeable in areas of the curricula, pedagogy and the principles of child development. When teaching, they use this knowledge creatively to ensure that concepts/skills, activities and materials are closely aligned with the principles of child development and are relevant and meaningful for all students. In so doing, these teachers strive to create stimulating learning experiences that support the intellectual, social, moral and personal development of all students. They continuously engage in research to find solutions to the problems they encounter in the classroom to make informed decisions.

Articulate and approachable teachers model effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to encourage engagement, collaboration and supportive interaction in the classroom. They know how to use a variety of communication tools, including audio-visual aids and other appropriate technology that can enrich learning opportunities. They foster inclusive classroom climates that encourage sharing of different perspectives. These teachers are accessible and interact with students, parents and the community. They communicate in ways that demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and gender differences.

Reflective teachers have a clear understanding of what is happening in their classrooms and the various roles that they play in these situations. They think reflectively about their practice and monitor their own performance to identify areas of needs in their respective practices. They identify strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching as well as in students' learning and use a variety of strategies to meet their needs and the needs of

Teaching can be described as a 'calling' as well as a 'profession' – great teachers always want students to learn and to feel proud of their achievements.

all students. **Respectful** teachers respect and value all students. They recognize that each child has a special talent and cultivate classroom climates that encourage each child to share his/her talents. These teachers set clear expectations with students' input. They listen to students and respect their opinions. They encourage students to express themselves and ask questions.

Intelligent and Inspiring teachers think critically and are not afraid to take action to bring about changes that positively impact the quality of teaching and learning. They are committed to students' learning and are willing to share expertise and collaborate with other colleagues. **Inspiring** teachers understand their roles and recognize the need for their involvement in on-going learning through mentorship, peer support and the evaluation process. They are flexible, resourceful and highly motivated. These exemplary teachers understand the various forms of diversity and celebrate those influences that contribute to students' learning and development.

Nurturing teachers recognize the uniqueness of each student and promote positive attitudes toward social and cultural diversity. They believe that all students can learn, while acknowledging the fact that students have different styles of learning and that the pace of learning may vary among them. These teachers set high expectations, while cultivating an atmosphere in which all students feel motivated to strive for excellence and value learning as a positive and rewarding experience. They aim to develop independent learners who have a strong sense of self.

Goal-oriented teachers focus on their responsibility for managing and monitoring students' learning in an effort to better meet the needs of all students. To achieve this, goal-oriented teachers use data from continuous diagnostic testing to facilitate ongoing improvement of teaching and learning. They engage in reflective thinking to determine strengths and weaknesses in their practices and set goals for professional development in their effort to ensure accountability to students, administration, parents and the wider community.

Quality teachers are **guided by ethical standards** and are committed to social justice. They continuously strive to maintain a learning environment that promotes and supports practices of fairness, equality, and objectivity. They also ensure that rules and procedures, as well as teaching methods provide students with an equal opportunity to learn, make mistakes, and grow from their experiences with other students.

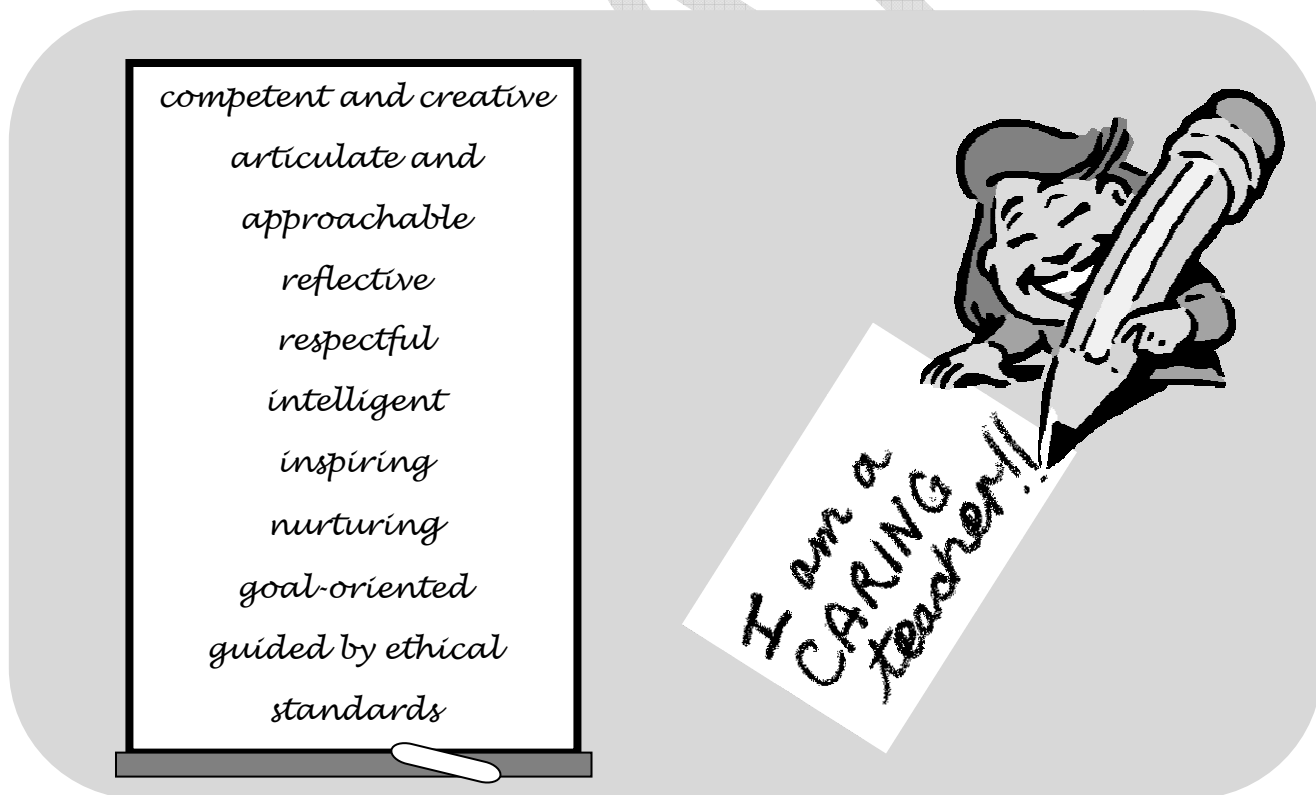


Figure 3. Characteristics of a CARING teacher

The Curriculum and its Delivery

Curriculum planning, curriculum development and assessment of learning are vital to improving the quality of a school. A relevant instructional program that is tied to high

standards builds student knowledge, strengthens critical thinking skills, and develops and nurtures positive attitudes. Careful and inclusive construction and delivery of the curriculum will ensure that the transformation to improved quality of learning will be realized and sustained because teaching strategies and interactions that help all students achieve are an important measure of quality schools. Appropriate and fair assessments monitor learning and truly measure what students know and can do.

Curriculum

A quality school develops its own school's curriculum. Curriculum in this sense is any document or plan in a school that defines the work of teachers, at least to the extent of identifying the content to be taught and the methods to be used in the process. Careful selection and articulation of curricular content is made from what is needed, desired, prescribed, delivered and hence received. Learning experiences provided by the school are guided primarily by the National Curriculum and comprise core, collateral, supportive and enrichment components.

Quality schools ensure that the messages of the hidden curriculum that deal with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior of all members of the school community are consistent with the school's written curriculum. Similarly, quality schools promote relevant and appropriate extra- and co-curricular opportunities to

enhance social interaction, leadership skills, healthy recreation, self-discipline and self-confidence.

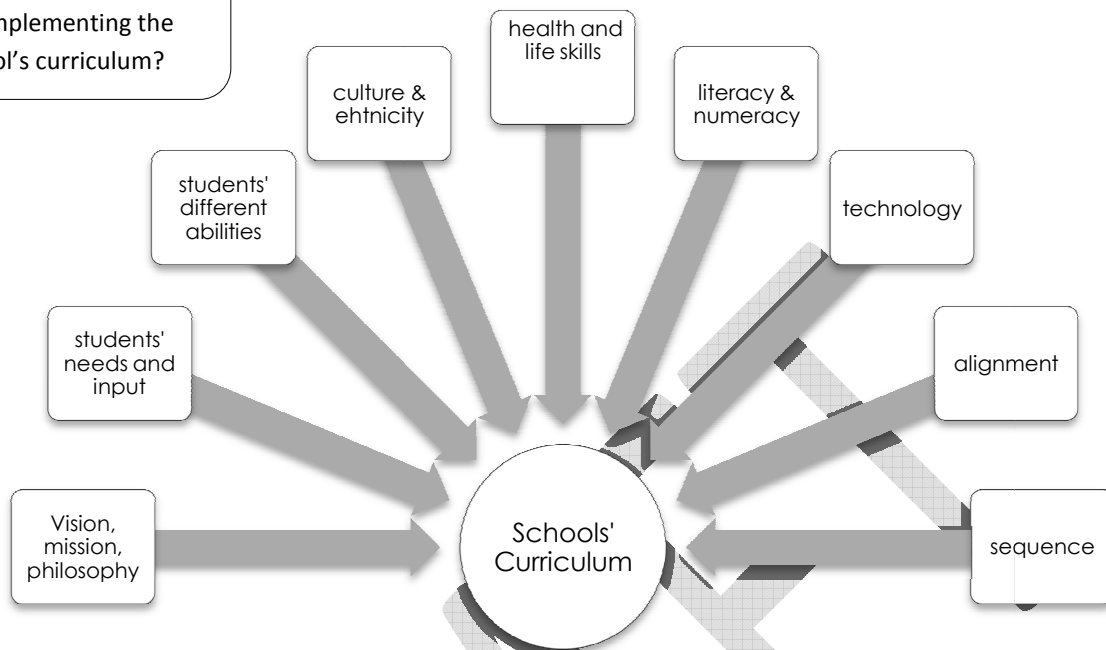
Are curriculum documents used in your school? Are they simply stored on a shelf?

How do you know that the curriculum is relevant to the students you teach?

Are you testing the student or are you testing what the student has learned?

*Are your assessments fair? Do you prepare test items to be intentionally difficult so that students **fail**? (and so that you can be known as a tough teacher?)*

Figure 4. What is considered when creating and implementing the school's curriculum?



Assessment

Assessment in schools is as important as the curriculum taught. Generally speaking, assessment can be used for screening, to identify special needs or for instructional improvement. The latter is highly practiced and used more frequently in instruction by teachers in quality schools. Teachers in quality schools demonstrate a conscious shift from traditional practices of assessment to more varied, relevant and student centered forms of assessment.

Note that one of the major errors teachers often make is to use assessment solely for reporting students' progress to parents. Assessment must be of *students' learning* and not of the students themselves; assessment should be positive.

A quality school engages in frequent assessment practices to increase student achievement, evaluate student progress, amend or guide teaching plans, make relevant referrals and comply with school reporting policies to parents.