

Reflection and Impact

Two of the problems that I believe most Headteachers face are: first, the pace of school life often does not allow time to think and define degrees with theoretical issues and, secondly, we often tend to be inward looking and do not get enough opportunity to see other schools or systems. This “Roots and Wings Programme” is addressing both of those issues. The time spent on theory and considering the present reality values and visions for the future did force me to reflect on the way that my school operate, and my own style of leadership. I am sure that all Headteachers wish to raise standards, improve performance and the overall quality of education. If these are to improve then inevitably something has to change. If we do things the same way that we have always done then we should not be surprised if we get the same results. The whole emphasis of this programme is to ‘do things differently’ but, first, considering our own values and style of leadership and, secondly, by being coached and challenged to reconsider our ways of teaching. The programme has given me two Headteacher colleagues from two other countries to offer advice and pose questions as well as the input of a coach. Already, I am doing certain things differently and am giving more careful thought to further actions.

Secondly, the visit did provide an opportunity to see another school system in operation both schools gave me ideas to bring back home and to consider with colleagues there may be some things that divide us but there is certainly much more that unites us and our common role of educating the young people of Europe. We have much to learn from each other.

I believe that the “Roots and Wings Programme” is an invaluable professional development for myself but also an opportunity for the school to gain benefits from the links that have been established. This visit was part of a process already begun and which will continue now that I am back in school. Contact will be regular and it will be another influence on the decision making process as the school continues along the path of school improvement. Nothing is ever static in education and I felt this ongoing projects will have a tangible impact on the challenges ahead.

Visit to Viejle, Denmark 3rd - 10th October, 2003

The concluding cycle of the Roots and Wings Leadership Programme began with myself and the other Ceredigion/Carmarthenshire Secondary Headteachers visiting Vejle and meeting up once again with the Italian and Danish colleagues. The first two days were spent in a conference looking again at theoretical issues relating to leadership and gaining information on the Danish school system.

The first day of the conference set out the aims programme, namely to consider the present reality in our schools to reflect upon that and to explore how we could 'act differently' with the aim of improving our schools.

The programme began with an input from a representative of the education authority in Denmark who explained the Danish school system. Education is compulsory in Denmark from the ages of 7 to 16 and the mainstay of the school system is the "Folkeskole". This is in essence an extended primary school with the form class as the key unit and pupils remaining together throughout their 9 year compulsory education. Like a primary school the Folkeskole is very much a local school with between 200 and 400 pupils in total – one or two form entry. Unlike Wales, there is much less government direction in terms of the curriculum and standards within subject are only just being developed. Again there is less emphasis on testing and assessment. The Danish system is very strong on values as emphasised in the aims of the Fokeskole

- The Folkeskole shall, in co-operation with the parents, further pupils acquisition of knowledge, skills, working methods and ways of expressing themselves and thus contribute to the all-round personal development of the individual pupil.
- The Folkeskole shall endeavour to create such opportunities for experience, industry and absorption, that the pupil develop awareness, imagination and the urge to learn, so that they acquire confidence in their own possibilities and background for forming independent judgements and for taking personal action.

- The Folkeskole shall familiarise the pupils with the Danish culture and contribute to their understanding of other cultures and of man's interaction with nature. The school shall prepare the pupils for active participation, joint responsibility, rights and duties in society based on freedom and democracy. The teaching of the school and its daily life must therefore build on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.

Although most pupils leave the Folkeskole at the end of Year 9 (age 16) there is the option to undertake one more year at the school for various reasons that may be educational or social.

Upper secondary education begins at 16 and there are three options covering between 2 and 5 years. The Youth Education Programmes (Ungdomsuddannelser) available are:

- General Upper Secondary School
- Technical and Commercial Upper secondary School.
- Vocational Education and Training.

About 53 % of pupils go on to the General Upper Secondary School (Gymnasium), whilst about 41 % go to Vocational Colleges. The drop out rate after the compulsory Folkeskole is about 6%.

Reflection and Impact of the Visit

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I believe that the “Roots and Wings Programme” is an invaluable professional development tool that has benefited both my school and myself. This visit was part of a process already begun and which will continue now that I am back in school. Contact will be regular and it will be another influence on the decision making process as the school continues along the path of school improvement. Nothing is ever static in education and I felt this ongoing project will have a tangible impact on the challenges ahead.

Ian McCloy