

# Applying the concept of 'best practice' to international schools

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This article explores the appropriateness and implications of adopting and adapting the business-oriented concept of 'best practice' in international schools. Because businesses and international schools tend to have contrasting goals and time-frames within which they seek to achieve their objectives, it is expected that 'best practice' in schools will differ from 'best practice' in the corporate world. A model of 'best practice' that suits the needs of international schools should also acknowledge the shift in approaches to learning from behaviourism through cognitivism to constructivism. It is argued that best practice in international schools should focus on achieving the goals of the mission statement in a manner that adapts flexibly to meet the individual needs of each student, includes ongoing professional development and feedback for teachers, and emphasizes a clear separation of governance and management.

**KEYWORDS** behaviourism, best practice, constructivist learning, international school, school governance, strategic planning, thinking skills

Cet article analyse la pertinence et les implications de l'adoption et de l'adaptation du concept originellement commercial de 'pratique exemplaire' aux établissements scolaires internationaux. Comme les entreprises commerciales et les établissements scolaires internationaux ont des buts et des délais contrastés avec lesquels ils tentent d'atteindre leurs objectifs, on s'attend à ce que les 'pratiques exemplaires' des écoles soient différentes des 'pratiques exemplaires' de la sphère commerciale. D'autre part, un modèle de 'pratiques exemplaires' qui convient aux besoins des établissements scolaires internationaux doit également tenir compte des évolutions des approches de l'apprentissage du behaviorisme vers le constructivisme, en passant par le cognitivisme. Selon certains, les pratiques exemplaires dans les écoles internationales devraient se concentrer sur l'accomplissement des objectifs de la déclaration de mission selon un mode d'adaptation flexible qui permettrait de répondre aux besoins de chaque élève, d'inclure le développement professionnel et le retour d'information continus pour les enseignants et d'insister sur l'importance d'une séparation claire entre la gouvernance et la gestion.

Este artículo explora las implicaciones y lo adecuado de que los colegios internacionales adopten y adapten el concepto comercial de 'mejor práctica'. Puesto que las empresas y los colegios internacionales suelen tener objetivos contrastados y distintos marcos temporales en los que tratan de alcanzar estos objetivos, se espera que lo que se considera 'mejor práctica' en los colegios sea diferente de la 'mejor práctica' en el mundo empresarial. Un modelo de 'mejor práctica' que cubra las necesidades de los colegios internacionales también deberá tener en cuenta la evolución en el modo de afrontar el aprendizaje: del conductismo al constructivismo, pasando por el cognitivismo. Algunos arguyen que, en los colegios internacionales, la 'mejor práctica' debe concentrarse en alcanzar los objetivos de su declaración de principios de forma que permita adaptarse fácilmente a las necesidades de cada alumno, debe contemplar un desarrollo profesional continuo e información para los profesores, y reflejar claramente la separación entre las estructuras de gobierno y la gestión.

## What is 'best practice'?

International schools are increasingly becoming exposed to approaches and philosophies that originate in the business or corporate sector. Among the new catch-cries for schools is 'best practice'. Given that the purposes of international schools are usually quite different from (even if complementary to) those of the corporate sector, it is appropriate to question what 'best practice' means in this context.

Principals, administrators, teachers and school governors across the world increasingly hear (or initiate) the call for 'best practice' in educational enterprises. This growing interest is exemplified by website statistics. Using the search engine AltaVista and entering the term 'best practice' revealed no fewer than 106,309 'hits' in late 1999. In June 2000, the number of 'hits' had risen to 175,744. In June 2001 the figure had increased to 906,382, growing further by August 2002 to 4,477,460 and by November 2003 to 5,921,936. By February 2004, the figure had grown to 6,252,776. Among the many web pages available, there is certainly no shortage of people or companies offering consultancies on 'best practice', usually for a substantial consultative fee.

The label 'best practice' is advocated in international schools as an approach to steer strategic planning, as a basis for policy implementation and as a measure to gauge the success of outcomes achieved, whether educational, financial or philosophical. Given the growing prevalence of the label 'best practice', it should cause concern if the concept is not well understood by those people who are either advocating or seeking to apply it in education, such as principals, administrators, teachers and governors in international schools.

There is no single commonly accepted definition or understanding of 'best practice'. One Australian website, uploaded by an organization calling itself the Centre for Best Practice, defines it as follows: 'Best Practice is about identifying the best ways of managing the firm and producing and delivering its services, while continually improving what the firm does' (Centre for Best Practice, 2004). Another corporate website, based in the information technology industry in Canada, defined 'best practice' in these words:

A Best Practice is a process, technique, or innovative use of technology, equipment or resources that has a proven record of success in providing significant improvement in cost, schedule, quality, performance, safety, environment, or other measurable factors which impact an organization. (Javelin Technologies, 2004)

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Yet another corporate website, this one US-based, took an even broader view of the concept:

A best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result. A commitment to using the best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to ensure success. (SearchVB.com Definitions, 2004)

This website offered the following observation about the flow and pace of 'best practice' dispersion:

A best practice tends to spread throughout a field or industry after a success has been demonstrated. However, it is often noted that demonstrated best practices can be slow to spread, even within an organization. According to the American Productivity & Quality Center, the three main barriers to adoption of a best practice are a lack of knowledge about current best practices, a lack of motivation to make changes involved in their adoption, and a lack of knowledge and skills required to do so.

If this assertion is true, and organizations are slow to create their own original 'best practices', preferring instead to adopt successful initiatives from elsewhere, and if there are significant barriers to 'best practice' adoption, then international schools face significant challenges in meeting the growing expectations to adopt 'best practice' in all that they do. This statement assumes, of course, that the process of implementing 'best practice' in international schools is broadly similar to the implementation of 'best practice' in the corporate world, where the concept originated. Whether or not this is so must be scrutinized, however, before any parallels are drawn between the implementation of 'best practice' in international schools and corporate 'best practice'.

### **Is international education just a business?**

Being aware of the 'push' in business and other circles to jump on a 'best practice' bandwagon, educators, parents and others involved with international schools might legitimately ask what the concept has to offer in the field of education. Such a question goes to the very heart of the purpose of education and the role that international schools play in the process of forming young people.

There is no universal agreement on the true purpose of education. Partington (1999) groups the commonly expressed purposes of education

by identifying five clusters of educational theories according to their respective priorities:

- transcendental education – what is thought to be of greatest value to God’s purposes;
- instrumental education – what is thought to be of greatest value to society broadly as it is;
- liberal education – what is thought to be of greatest value to the development of the mind;
- reconstructionist education – what is thought to be of greatest value in transforming society, from how it is, to one of radically different character; and
- child-centred education – what is thought to be of greatest value or interest to the child.

Of course, these groups of theories are not mutually exclusive. A close relationship is possible between aspects of reconstructionist and transcendental education, to take just one example, and these may in turn have considerable overlap with both child-centred and liberal education. Nonetheless, the choice a person makes between these five groups will say a great deal about their educational priorities.

Whichever priority or purpose of education is considered paramount, however, it is likely to differ from the overall objectives of most corporate enterprises, which are usually more financially and commercially driven. Although the corporate structures of international schools vary enormously, most see themselves as having an important role to play in forming young lives in a way that shapes global society for the better. The United World Colleges (UWC), to take one example of a very significant group of 10 international schools, define their purpose as follows:

Through international education, experience and community service, United World Colleges enable young people to become responsible citizens, politically and environmentally aware, and committed to the ideals of peace and justice, understanding and cooperation, and the implementation of these ideals through action and personal example. (United World Colleges, 2004)

Of course, there are many models of international schooling. Perhaps the largest single grouping of schools claiming to embrace an international curriculum are the 1300 schools affiliated with the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). These schools undertake to work towards the IBO’s mission statement:

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The International Baccalaureate Organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect . . . These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2004)

In contrast with these lofty ideals that span a generation or two into the future, many businesses tend to focus on short-term planning which reflects the duration of balance sheets. Short-term thinking is particularly dominant in western societies, and it contrasts with Asian societies which tend to hold longer term views. A media interview with Deng Xiaoping in the mid-1980s, shortly after agreement had been reached with the British to return Hong Kong to China in 1997, exemplified this contrast. A western reporter asked Deng Xiaoping whether he felt the 'Hong Kong solution' might also have applicability to Taiwan. Deng replied that he saw it as inevitable that Taiwan would return to China. When asked when this would happen, Deng replied 'Oh, not too far into the future; certainly in the next four to five hundred years.' In another famous example, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was asked in the early 1970s to give his opinion on the impact of the French Revolution in 1789, and his reply was simply that is too early to tell.

It follows from this that, even if international schools accept a corporate definition of the concept of 'best practice', such as any one of those outlined earlier in this paper, the interpretation, implications and implementation of 'best practice' will differ for organizations with different goals, missions and visions. We can therefore distinguish between 'corporate best practice' which tends to focus on control, accountability and achievement of short-term goals, and 'educational best practice' which has a long-term focus of creating an inspiring and sustainable vision, based on a sound philosophy. The different approaches simply reflect the different priorities of profit-driven businesses and corporations on the one hand, and international schools on the other. The rest of this paper develops this concept of 'educational best practice' and looks at its outworkings as they apply specifically to international schools.

### **Changing approaches to learning**

If we examine almost any aspect of our lives, we see evidence of huge structural changes which have transformed ways of doing things during the 20th century. Farming, mining, transport and manufacturing are now

almost unrecognizable compared with a century ago. In many cases, observers would comment that these changes reflect the adoption of 'best practice'.

If one were to walk into a modern classroom in many countries of the world, one would see an environment that appears to be totally different from that of a generation ago. Depending on the country and the educational tradition, the desks would probably not be arranged in square rows, there would be far fewer students in each class, the décor would be bright and colourful and would feature examples of students' work, and there would be a number of networked computers in the room, almost certainly connected to the internet which has the effect of pushing the walls of the classroom out to the ends of the earth. Many of the students may be using graphics calculators that can store the equivalent of hundreds of pages of information in them. But these are really just superficial indicators of the really big change that has occurred, and that is in the type of *thinking* that students are encouraged to develop.

Perceptions of 'best practice' in approaches to teaching have undergone significant change in recent decades. For most of the 20th century, learning in schools was heavily influenced by the approach called *behaviourism*. Behaviourism dominated educational thinking until the early 1970s, and took the view that learning results from forming associations between behaviours and their consequences. Behaviourists such as B.F. Skinner (1938, 1953, 1974) argued that responses are shaped by reinforcing desired behaviours, and this is done most effectively through extrinsic motivators (rewards and punishments). According to behaviourists, learning occurs best when target behaviours are specified (implying that 'there is only one right answer'). Thus, behaviourism was consistent with the industrial notion of the assembly line, and behaviourist learning often emphasized drill and practice exercises which developed 'inert' knowledge.

Behaviourism, or modifying people's responses through rewards and punishments, tends to dominate corporate concepts of 'best practice', which seek specific outcomes based on short-term goals. When performance appraisal is used for remuneration reviews, a quite narrow behaviourist approach is being explicitly adopted.

However, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, *cognitive processing* tended to emerge as the dominant learning model, or at least a serious rival of behaviourism. The cognitive processing model, advocated by researchers such as Jerome Bruner (et al., 1956; 1973) and Lev Vygotsky (1934), was based on the Piagetian notion that learning occurs as the individual interacts with the environment. Cognitive processing emphasizes discovery

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learning, through which the knowledge that is 'out there' is found, assimilated and accommodated.

During the 1990s, both the behaviourist and cognitive processing models fell into general disfavour among educators, as these approaches were seen to reflect an outdated 'industrial revolution' or 'factory line' approach to learning. Behaviourism works best when predetermined outcomes are desired, and many educators argue that this stifles creativity and problem solving. Contemporary educationists favour a more balanced approach, advocating a repertoire of learning styles which especially include *constructivist* learning theories. Constructivists such as John Dewey (1929, 1933) and others (see University College Worcester, 2004) view the learner as an active being within the environment, not just responding to stimuli, but engaging, grappling and seeking to make sense of things. Knowledge is generated internally using external data, rather than being simply absorbed from an external source, and motivation is intrinsic. By adopting principles of critical thinking and logic, learners make tentative interpretations of experience and then go on to elaborate and test those interpretations, constructing new knowledge. Learners form knowledge by linking new information to already known information and understandings. Therefore, when confronted with something that does not seem consistent with these earlier understandings, a temporary disharmony must be accepted until it is resolved by forming new connections and linkages. Learning environments, like life itself, are thus complex, non-linear and open-ended. Where this approach extends and builds upon an established knowledge base, then a balanced model of educational formation is achieved. Thus, learning which includes a constructivist dimension aims to develop reasoning, critical and creative thinking skills, problem solving, retention and use of understandings, cognitive transfer of concepts, and metacognitive reflection of experience, all through open-ended learning experiences. The emphasis is on process rather than product, though significant value should still be placed on the outcomes of the process. (A very useful expansion of constructivist ideas can be found at <http://www.elquest.net/constructivism.htm>.)

Any discussion of 'best practice' in international education must therefore include consideration of the relative merits of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism in aiding the mission of the international school in question. The underlying principle of both the UWC and IBO mission statements – intercultural understanding expressed through action – requires the development of skills in creative problem solving, an open acceptance (indeed, celebration) of difference and recognition that the contention of competing ideas is healthy. This suggests that constructivist

learning should play a significant part in international schools aiming for 'best practice'.

### **Translating 'best practice' into action**

Although indicative of the mission statements of many international schools, those of the IBO and UWCs are not the only possible approaches towards international education. To be authentic, 'best practice' must resonate with the philosophy and objectives of each individual international school. A school which aims for nothing is highly likely to achieve just that! If there is no agreed vision and values position, then either the school community will be racked with dissention and debate, or it will simply stagnate through paralysis. This can be an issue especially in international schools, where even the spelling of words can become contentious. In his book *Leading Minds: Anatomy of Leadership*, Howard Gardner (1995: 55) writes:

Most human beings crave an explicit statement of values – a perspective on what counts as being true, beautiful, and good. Traditionally these views have come from art or religion; more recently they have come as well from philosophy, science and newly constructed secular groups. Personal introspection and discussion are additional sources of value systems. At times of stability, the accepted norms may be adhered to without discussion. But particularly in times of crisis or cataclysmic change, individuals crave a larger explanatory framework.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, a perceived dichotomy between 'facts' and 'values' found its way into the classrooms of many countries. The result was the rise of a so-called 'values-free' education, where no value judgements were supposed to intrude into teaching. It is now understood that 'values-free' education itself imposes a values position – specifically the contention that value-free facts (if they exist) are intrinsically more valuable than something with an ethical or moral dimension. Furthermore, a so-called 'values-free' education would seem to be incompatible with building a better global society based on intercultural understanding and expressed through personal action. Many educators today would contend that young people are intrinsically idealistic and want to make the world a better place.

By necessity, any vision and values position must be translated into practice. The means of implementation will vary from school to school, from country to country and from culture to culture. It seems important,



however, that an inclusive planning process is undertaken so that the vision is articulated clearly and is supported by a consensus of the entire school community, and especially by the teachers and staff whose job it is to implement it. Because international schools focus on outcomes that span several decades in time, it follows that 'educational best practice' should involve an explicit focus on *long-term thinking*. The author of *On Leadership*, John W Gardner, has written that 'the future is not shaped by people who don't really believe in the future' (Gardner, 1985: 55). Better known are the words of George Santayana who wrote 'those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it' (Santayana, 1905). Each of these sayings emphasizes the need to examine the past, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a very practical end. If future global society is to be shaped for the better, as most international schools' mission statements would insist, a long-term view is required which extends both into the past and into the future.

Ever since Alvin Toffler wrote *Future Shock* in 1970, it has been recognized that the pace of change is accelerating. Realistically, it is impossible for any single school administrator to keep up with every piece of relevant new research or administrative change which is directed by higher authorities. The appropriate 'best practice' response to rapid change and information overload is to maintain a clear and unambiguous focus on the long-term vision, to acquire and nurture good staff, and to delegate effectively in order that the long-term vision will be achieved.

An international school's *teaching staff* is usually regarded as its most important asset, and they are therefore a key element in successfully implementing 'best practice'. Almost 200 years ago, the Chinese writer Wei Yuan (1794–1857) stated 'lack of financial resources is not poverty to a nation; failure to make the best use of its human resources is real poverty'. More recently, the co-founder and chief executive of Apple Computer, Steve Jobs, stated 'It's not just recruiting. It's building an environment that makes people feel they are surrounded by equally talented people and that their work is bigger than they are.' Teachers define the identity and character of an international school, probably even more than buildings or facilities. For most parents and students, the staff are the 'face' of the school, and a quality education will result only from the fruits of their labours. It is the staff who must implement the long-term vision.

As corporate models of best practice are introduced into international schools, programmes of teacher appraisal are being advocated with increasing frequency as a means to measure and perhaps guarantee teaching quality. In view of the principles of 'best practice' outlined above, it follows that if teacher appraisal is to be effective, it should focus the attention of

teachers and others on the vision and values position of the school, encouraging them and assisting greatly in achieving the vision. Certainly, it seems appropriate that appraisal processes should be flexible and not onerous. Appraisal and accountability are generally accepted practices in most professions, and are seen as normal elements of 'best practice' in the corporate world. Its acceptance varies among different international schools, and if staff see appraisal as a threat, or if it operates without trust, it is unlikely to achieve its objectives of enhancing the achievement of the school's aims or encouraging staff to embrace the long-term vision and direction of the school.

Implementing the vision and values of the school naturally leads to consideration of school leadership. It is generally accepted that while top-down authoritarian leadership is increasingly anachronistic and ineffective, the school principal has a pivotal role to play in ensuring 'best practice'. Indeed, Collins contrasts the 'Level 5 Executive Leader' who 'builds enduring greatness' with the 'Level 4 Effective Leader' who 'catalyses commitment to a compelling vision and higher performance standards' (Collins, 2001).

In the United Kingdom, Hay Management Consultants (Hay Group, 1999; HMC, 2000) compared 200 highly effective school principals with 200 senior executives in business. They found that both groups were equally impressive and that 'the role of headteacher is stretching, by comparison to business' (in Fullan, 2002: 9). An Australian study identified five areas in which highly effective principals exert influence: driving school improvement, delivering through people, building commitment, creating an educational vision and big picture thinking.

Marshall saw 'best practice' leadership in schools as being tied to teacher professionalism, 'with school leaders using the organizing principles of clarity and standards to assist them to set priorities and determine what action is to be taken to improve school performance' (Marshall, 2002: 13). He identified four key elements for leadership of school improvement: leaders providing clarity (of the goals and values of the school together with the roles and responsibilities of the staff), leaders focusing on standards (by improving the standards of learning by students and the teaching and professional standards of staff), leaders building professional capacity (through professional culture and effective human management) and leaders building leadership.

Consideration of school leadership leads to an examination of the structure of *governance*. School boards are responsible for the governance of most international schools, and this role includes financial oversight, the setting of policies and the recruitment of the head. The head in turn usually

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appoints the staff, and implements the policies that have been determined by the school board. Consultants with extensive experience in advising international schools such as John Littleford (2004), John Carver (1997, 2004) and the Council of International Schools (CIS, 2004) argue that the separation of governance (the role of the board) and management (the role of the head) is crucially important for stability and progress. They argue that board members should resist the temptation to become too 'hands-on', usurping the role that they have employed (hopefully) highly talented individuals to implement, recognizing the clear boundaries between governance and management. They argue also that it is important that boards act as a single entity, following a 'one voice' philosophy, in which the head is accountable only to the board as a body, not to individual members' agendas.

It is generally acknowledged that no task is more important for the board than appointing the head (Association of Heads of International Schools of Australia, 2003). If the board gets this appointment right, and if the board then collectively gives the head its full support to manage the school while the board sets overall policy and governs, and moreover provided the chair maintains strong discipline among board members, then a school has all the elements of a strong school moving forward confidently – in other words, adopting 'best practice' at board level. In this way, the governance and management arms of the international school should work together to achieve the mission.

The mission statements of most international schools are explicitly student-focused, and in general, are oriented towards globally enhancing goals such as peace, justice, international understanding, service towards others and environmental sustainability. As exemplified by the UWC and IBO mission statements, international schools tend to specify their goals in terms of the types of students they will produce. The clear focus upon students that characterizes most international schools means that if the aims of the school are to be achieved, 'best practice' must impact directly upon the students' experiences. The mission and vision should find expression not simply in rhetoric, but through action on the part of the students, and thus by implication, through the example and role modelling of the teachers. Given the extreme diversity of students in most international schools, with their wide range of cultural, linguistic and religious perspectives as well as varying traditions towards the process of learning, 'best practice' requires that recognition be given to *individual differences among students*.

In 1983, the American Professor Howard Gardner formulated the now famous model of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1985). Gardner took

contemporary research on the brain, including Roger Sperry's Left Brain/Right Brain research, Paul MacLean's Triune Brain research and Karl Pribram's Hologram Brain model, and identified seven 'ways of knowing', to which an eighth was added later: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, body/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and existential intelligence.

The essence of Gardner's model is that different people learn through different means, and individual people vary their learning style from time to time. There are significant implications in this research which explain why some students perform better with some teachers than others, why some students perform better in some subjects than others and why it is necessary to identify each individual student's area of giftedness and allow full scope for its development. Gardner's multiple intelligences implies that individual and small group learning should play a significant part in each student's education, that a variety of forms of input be used with every class in every subject and that opportunities be provided for metacognitive reflection with students, even those of a very young age who are discovering their preferred learning styles.

Gardner's multiple intelligences have gained wide acceptance, and have been translated into classroom programmes by educators such as David Lazear. Furthermore, they have provided a foundation for even more ambitious frameworks of learning such as Robert Marzano's 'Dimensions of Learning'. Marzano reviewed some 30 years of educational research into learning processes and translated this into a framework of classroom teaching based on five types, or 'dimensions', of thinking which can apply to students of any age: (1) positive attitudes and perceptions about learning; (2) thinking involved in acquiring and integrating knowledge; (3) thinking involved in extending and refining knowledge; (4) thinking involved in using knowledge meaningfully; and (5) productive habits of mind (Marzano, 1992).

Research undertaken at Prince Alfred College, a school in Australia that teaches all three IBO programmes and that has a significant international student population, has demonstrated that the introduction of Marzano's Dimensions of Learning framework accelerated students' learning in the sciences by the equivalent of an average of 40 percent of one year over the five years of secondary schooling (Thompson, 1999).

### **Lessons to be drawn**

In a famous quotation, Albert Einstein said 'The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems which cannot be

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solved with the same level of thinking at which we created them' (in Calaprice, 2000: 317). In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of research into the characteristics of schools that are generally regarded as 'successful'; perhaps these could be considered attempts to develop practical models of 'educational best practice'. In 1997, Judy Codding produced a paper entitled 'Designing highly effective programs for successful schools' in which she identified five principles for action in schools (Codding, 1997). These five principles were: (1) ensure front-line workers (principals and teachers) understand the problem; (2) design jobs so that all future workers have both incentives and opportunities to contribute to society; (3) provide all front-line workers with the training needed to pursue solutions effectively; (4) measure progress on a regular basis; and (5) keep learning as there are no magic bullets.

By contrast, this paper has taken a different approach, attempting to relate 'best practice' explicitly to the specific characteristics and demands of international schools. Recognizing that international schools exist to serve a different purpose than most corporations and businesses, and indeed many national schools, it is argued that 'best practice' in international schools should focus specifically on their distinctive student-oriented globally focused long-term mission statements. The implementation of this principle will vary from school to school, in the same way that individual mission statements vary from school to school. Nonetheless, for most international schools, 'best practice' will incorporate constructivist learning that adapts flexibly to meet the individual needs of each student, ongoing professional development and feedback for the teachers and clear separation of the governance and management aspects of school leadership. The mechanism of implementing 'best practice' will also vary from school to school. Some schools use evaluation and accreditation as a mechanism, employing programmes such as those offered by the Council of International Schools (CIS), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) or the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

Other schools develop strategic plans which contain an explicit focus on 'best practice' in a way that relates authentically to the school's distinctive identity. At my own former school (Prince Alfred College), a new strategic plan was developed in 2001 to provide a long-term framework for planning. The framework of this strategic plan provides one practical example of an approach whereby schools might implement the complex task of creating a learning organization based on educational best practice. Building on ideas espoused in Louise Stoll's paper on successful schools (Stoll,

1997), eight key strategies were identified that would help to achieve this goal:

1. Focus constantly on teaching, learning and authentic educational best practice.
2. Promote a culture of high expectations with a belief that an education based on moral, ethical and religious values makes a positive difference for young people.
3. Offer every student as full a range of opportunities in as many fields as possible.
4. Develop an international perspective and a sense of global awareness as an integral part of the school culture.
5. Provide autonomy to the staff and management while maintaining accountability.
6. Ensure flexibility and a highly developed capacity to manage change at all levels.
7. Prepare consciously for the future through strategic positioning, encouraging controlled and targeted innovation.
8. Target steady and sufficient funding to meet identified needs.

The overall target outcome was then identified for each student while at the same time trying to allow for individual differences – the profile of the ideal ‘graduate at graduation’. It is undertaken that by the time they leave school, every student (regardless of individual differences) will be highly literate, highly numerate, highly ethical, well-informed, capable of learning constantly and confident and able to play their part as a citizen in national society with a global perspective. Furthermore, it was stated that every student must have the opportunity to become highly competent in several fields, highly creative and innovative, and capable of leadership. Finally, these goals were deliberately constrained by the proclaiming that no new programme or service would be implemented unless:

- it contributes to the stated vision;
- it is consistent with the school’s agreed values;
- it is accompanied by staff professional development;
- it is accompanied by a plan to assess its effectiveness; and
- there are sufficient resources to ensure effective implementation.

A framework such as this provides one approach whereby schools can direct themselves towards the task of preparing students who are capable of shaping global society for the better. Naturally, each school would

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have to undertake the task itself of relating this broad framework to its own specific vision, resource structure, political situation, priorities and aspirations.

A Maori saying that captured my imagination while I was working in New Zealand perhaps highlights the importance of adapting the concept of 'best practice' appropriately to meet the distinctive circumstances of international schools: 'The bird that eats only the fruits of the forest – theirs will be the forest. The bird that eats the fruits of education – theirs will be the world.'

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