

## FOUNDATIONS OF LEARNING

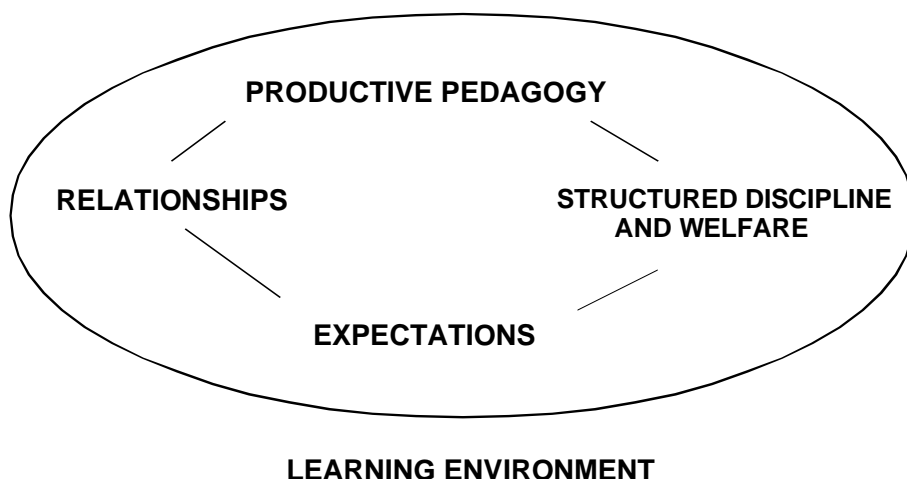
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### Fundamental Education Environment.

In recent years there has been an emphasis on improving the delivery of curriculum as the way to improve the learning outcomes of schools. This push for 'productive pedagogy' has been driven by academics and senior education officers and reflects the long held belief that if the lessons are stimulating and rewarding learning will follow despite other issues facing schools.

The major issue facing schools at this time is the difficulty caused by student's disruptive behaviour. This has been a major concern identified in the recent Vinson Report and Education Departments have acknowledged it as evidenced by the huge investments made to deal with the problems caused by students with dysfunctional behaviour.

This workshop relates how one school, Holsworthy High, developed a total learning environment in which the human factors and relationships are addressed to underpin successful curriculum delivery. The illustration below summarizes the Holsworthy Model.



Even though this presentation does not discuss the crucial role of curriculum delivery it is in no way devaluing the vital role it plays. The view taken is that unless the other qualities of a Learning Environment are not in place there is little time for teaching and learning to take place.

### Structured Discipline and Welfare.

A structured approach to discipline ensures that there is strong predictability between the actions of students and the consequences that follow. That is, if a student misbehaves in class every one knows the consequences that will follow. The formation of rules for the class and for the whole school creates a predictable setting where both students and teachers can become certain about actions that must be taken. This certainty reduces stress levels for all members of the school.

It is imperative that the welfare component of the whole school policy is such that students and teachers who are particularly needy are identified and the limited resources available are best utilized. The welfare policy has a descending level of outcomes which identifies students on the degree of their behaviour disability

### Expectations.

The emphasis on expectations is more sophisticated than just that we have clearly defined standards of behaviour. Recent work by Clinch has shown that there is a direct correlation between a student's understanding of the school's expectations and their knowledge of these expectations. Further there is an expectation students experience on an emotional level that is based on their past experiences. For

example a student who has predominately endured failure with a particular subject will come to the lessons with an anticipation that this frustration will continue. At Holsworthy the school has adopted a program that has great promise in reversing this expectation.

### **Relationships.**

It is of primary importance that all members of the school community have a sense that they are valued within the community and that the community itself is of value. In a dysfunctioning school, students and teachers are too often locked in toxic relationships where the behaviour repertoire is more about controlling the other through psychological or physical threat rather than supporting. To address these problems, teachers in the first part are taught to identify the gambits students are likely to use to avoid their responsibilities and resist submitting to their pressures. The teachers develop strong boundaries which allow them to remain calm and in control of their own behaviour.

The school is also very aware of the impact of language in building a relationship with the students. Language has a great influence on provoking emotions and emotions are significant in driving behaviour. The difference is as subtle as changing from "What are you doing?", which may provoke guilt, to "How can I help you get back on task?" which implies support. Positive relationships are capable of the most profound changes in a student's learning outcomes.

### **Learning Environment.**

The development of a Learning Environment takes a good deal of time and is ongoing. At Holsworthy, the introduction has been systematic and staged with the first step raising an awareness in the need to change. Structured Discipline and Welfare is the easiest to achieve and superficially the most dramatic. When this was achieved the more significant aspects of the model, expectations and relationships have been introduced. Teachers and students have been encouraged and supported to try new approaches.

### **Outcomes.**

This process has been underway for three years and is still not completed. The structure is well in place and much work has been done on the other components. Results in behaviour improvements and learning outcomes have been dramatic. On every measure there has been a positive shift in the culture of the school and 2002 HSC results have shown a huge improvement.

John Frew