



NEW SCHOOL THINKING
October 16th 2009

LEWES HOSTS NATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE Friday 16th October 2009

On Friday, 16th the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) was grabbing the headlines with claims that formal education should wait until the child is 6 and SATs should be replaced. Meanwhile, a small school in East Sussex, which already practices these recommendations, was hosting a conference on innovative practice in primary school education.

The inaugural **New School Thinking** conference was held at Lewes New School to bring lecturers & researchers together with parents, teachers and heads in primary schools. Delegates shared their experience and understanding to be a part of a growing community that believes a change in primary school education will only come from the grass roots.

The Government and Opposition's swift and dismissive response to the Cambridge Review only confirms the need for such a venture. So, on the Friday a total of 45 delegates arrived at Lewes New School from across the country. **Lizzie Overton**, the school co-Head, welcomed the delegates and introduced the conference chair, **Professor Ivor Goodson** of Brighton University.

Professor Goodson started by commenting on the CPR and how key aspects of the review highlighted some of the existing practices already at work within many schools, as represented by delegates at the conference. He went on to discuss some of the different systems being played out in countries across Europe. He set the tone for the conference by stating that *'schools with more autonomy and flexible curriculums received a much higher PISA rating'* (Programme for International Student Assessment) than the test-dominated, rigid and centrally controlled schools found in the UK and Ireland. Professor Goodson went on to introduce the keynote speaker **Professor Bill Lucas** from the Real Life Learning Centre at the University of Winchester.



For almost an hour Professor Lucas entertained and enlightened the delegates with his research, experience and theory on new kinds of learning and teaching, backed up by what the research says.

His message was clear; teaching children *how* to learn was the key component to a successful learning environment. It is not *what* we teach our children that

is vital but the *ways* in which they can learn. And there is no single method. Indeed, he likened the numerous approaches to learning (lecture based, text based, enquiry based, technology enhanced, teaching organized around individuals versus co-operative groups, etc.) like the tools in a toolbox – each has its merits and that teachers would do their pupils a disservice if they stuck to just one approach.

“Superb overview and distillation of key ideas.”

Marcus John
Headteacher, Bromley Heath
Junior School, Bristol

Following on from that, delegates split into three themed workshops; *teacher vs. learner, group vs. individual & freedom vs. rigour*. The details of the discussion in these groups will be posted on the newschoolthinking.com website shortly. Within each group, a presentation was made either illustrating an example of a particular approach to teaching or offering a viewpoint with which to kick-off a discussion.

Before lunch was taken, the conference reconvened to give every delegate a flavour of what had been discussed across the various groups.



In the afternoon, the conference was treated to an unforgettable workshop guided by **Jeremy Stockwell**, a leading consultant in the art of communication. Having worked with leading politicians and business leaders throughout the world, Jeremy was able to enlighten the conference with his skill and perception in a thoroughly entertaining and physically active series of activities. His work gave delegates insights into learning and communication.

“Excellent. Thoroughly enjoyable and pertinent.”

Gavin Burke, trainee teacher

The morning’s three workshops were then re-visited, with each delegate being given the opportunity to describe what they were able to take away from the conference. The overwhelming feeling was that a real community had been formed by the day’s events.

What had started out as a collection of disparate educationalists with commonly held values had become a group of people intent on keeping in touch for the purpose of supporting each other and sharing ideas and practices. If there is going to be a change in primary school education, the academics, teachers and parents at the conference know that they will be that change.

“A very exciting day. So lovely to meet so many people who are passionate about education that is respectful and nurturing.”

Lin Westmoreland, NIACE

Videos and presentations from the day will shortly be available on www.NewSchoolThinking.com

Dahlan Lassalle

Conference introduction by Lizzie Overton – Co-Head Teacher at Lewes New School.

“On the day of the publication of the Cambridge Primary Review and with much talk of new government and new educational policy, there couldn’t be a more important time for those involved in education to re-group and define how we best meet the needs of our nation’s children.

All too often our most innovative practitioners work quietly and unsung in the hope that if no one knows what they’re up to they’ll be allowed to continue with what they know to be right.

However, with the financial and environmental worlds crunching around us there seems at last to be a growing realisation that imaginative teachers might after all be exactly what we need if future generations are to find creative ideas for a sustainable future.

Probably all of us who are here today share George Bernard Shaw’s desire to see ‘the child in pursuit of knowledge’ rather than ‘knowledge in pursuit of the child’. What we have yet to discover is how our different experiences and practices might inspire and inform our collective way forward. “