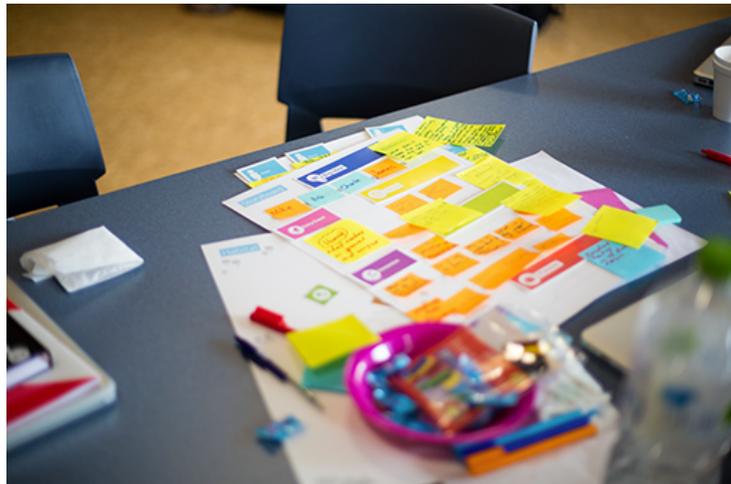


School charters — walking the talk

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In recent months all New Zealand schools have been reviewing and developing their charter document for 2016– 2019. The charter is the Board of Trustees' number one policy document, and sets the future direction of the school by outlining the school's vision, values, and strategic goals. This process creates a wonderful opportunity for community engagement to discuss and explore the way education is changing, and the aspirations and needs of the community. It promotes clarity, fostering shared understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.

Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) talk about schools having three types of future — a possible future, a probable future, and a preferable future. In terms of possible future, anything is possible. A probable future is best described as, if you keep doing what you've always done, your future will probably be one that is comfortable and one that you know. In contrast, a preferable future is when you take charge of the type of future you want; review where you are currently at; explore possible options for development; select the preferred path, and strategically plan to achieve your desired future. The charter review and development process provides schools with the opportunity to identify their preferable future.

This process can, at times, appear to be a daunting task, with school leaders unsure of where to begin. Reviewing what is currently in place provides a framework for the initial discussion. The following questions provide examples of how to facilitate this dialogue with community, Board of Trustees, staff, and possibly students.

- Is the current vision relevant and meaningful to our students, staff and community?
- Does it clearly outline what we are trying to achieve?
- Does it guide and determine our decision-making?

- Is it explicit and evident in what we say and do?
- Does this signal that we are preparing students for their future?

For example, if we say that our vision is to develop confident connected lifelong learners, we need to consider what this would look like, sound like, and feel like in our school. What does this look like for students, for teachers, for the community, and the board? Is this integral to our everydayness — at board level, leadership, teaching, and learning programmes? How does this vision guide decision-making? What are the implications in regard to strategic goals, resourcing, and the design of learning spaces?

[Simon Sinek](#) uses what he calls the Golden Circle (illustrated below) to highlight the importance of placing our vision and values at the centre of our planning, building outwards to the principles, and then practices from there. He refers to the centre of the circle as the 'WHY', suggesting this should always determine what we do as we build towards our preferred future. Dr Julia Atkin explores this in depth in her paper [From Values and Beliefs about Learning to Principles and Practice](#).

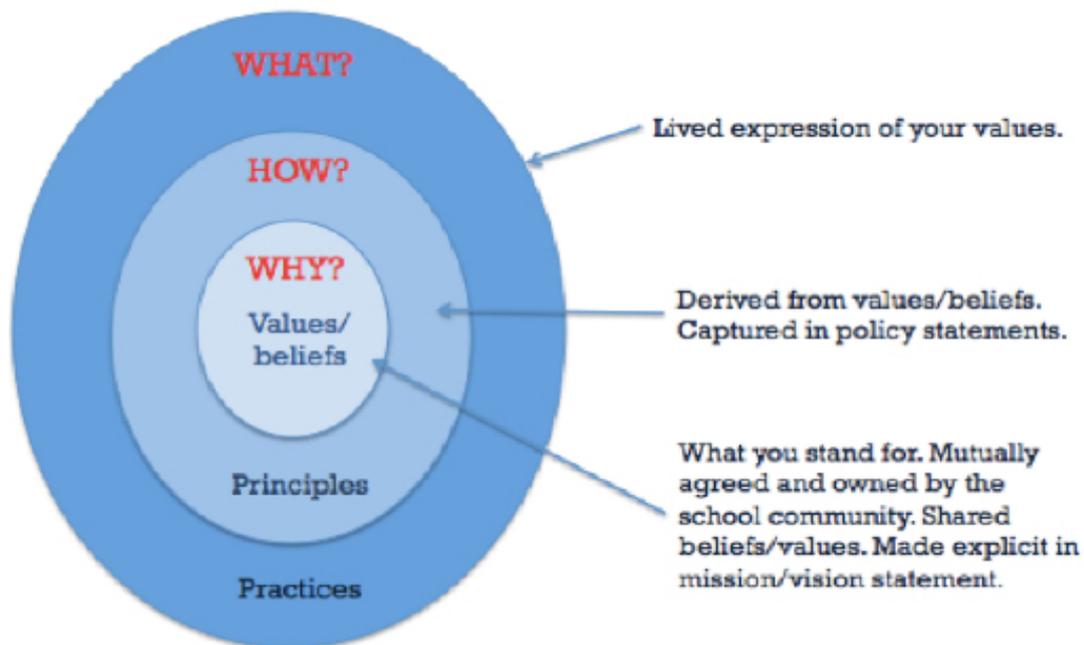


Image: Derek Wenmoth

Taking time to unpack the principles and practices associated with the school vision and values promotes clarity through shared understanding of expectations. For example, if the school values collaboration, and believes that this is integral to enacting the vision, then time needs to be spent to clearly identify the associated principles and practices. The following questions provide suggestions for facilitating this dialogue:

1. What are the deliberate acts of teaching that support collaboration?
2. What are the deliberate acts of leadership to support collaboration?
3. What resources can we draw on to foster collaboration?

4. How can we design our learning spaces to promote collaboration?

The process of reviewing the school vision, values and strategic goals sets the future direction for the school. It breathes life into the identified preferable future, taking it from words to actions by providing opportunities to explore meaning and clarify expectations. Investing time in this process, involving all stakeholders, promotes ownership of and commitment to enactment of the vision and values. This ensures that schools will indeed walk the talk of their school charter.

References

Atkin, J. (1996) From values and beliefs about learning to principles and practice. [Available online](#)

Sinek, S. (2014) Start with the why. [Available online](#)

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[Jo Wilson](#) is a Senior Consultant at CORE specialising in the area of school self review, strategic planning, future-focused development, community consultation, governance and management. Previously, she was Project Leader of the ICT PD team, which then transitioned into Project Leader of the Blended eLearning team. Jo believes that we are living in an exciting time of 'change', and as educators we need to have an understanding of the theory of 'change', and know how to use this to ensure that we are creating learning communities that will prepare our teachers and students for the ever-changing world that they live in.