

Teaching Kids not Subjects as the Heart of Learning

Viscount Primary School, Auckland New Zealand

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Our visit to New Zealand was inspiring not only from the beauty of this amazing country but from visiting schools that demonstrate what authentic communities of learning really look like. Each school we visited across New Zealand helped us realize the autonomy schools have in developing collaborative communities and how strong leadership encourages cultures of learning. We had a wonderful meeting with Barbare Woods, Deputy Principal of [Viscount Primary School in Mangere district of Auckland](#) who shared with us that all students at Viscount have two obligations:

- The obligation to learn
- The obligation is to help other people to learn

The Viscount Learning Community cultivates “the knowledge, skills, strategies and habits of mind necessary for successful learners.” This learning helps students develop a set of personal values and a sense of social responsibility.

The Heart of Learning

As we visited classrooms, it was apparent that the spirit of this learning community begins with the heart.

The heart of the learning community is integrated throughout the school environment. Hearts are found in every classroom that represents that class's desire to add to their own learning and to foster the learning community for others. Words and phrases on the hearts possess humanistic qualities each class collectively decides what they want to embody in the hearts. Words and phrases such as: humble, perseverance, risk taker, responsibility, motivating myself, and listening are a few of the powerful words of inspiration that hang from the ceilings and cover the walls of each classroom at Viscount.



Four Themes of Learning

For a somewhat transient population consisting of Islanders (Samoan, Cook, Tongan) and native Maoris, the school builds a learning community that is an extension of the family, an environment for learning, and an environment to construct learning. The school year is divided into four themes.

1. Learning Community
2. Questioning
3. Learning to Learn
4. Thinking about the Learning

Each classroom focuses on that school theme through actions, words, and behaviors. We visited the school while they were involved in the "learning to learn" term. An example of how students learn to learn is manifested through an activity that focuses on literacy. Students learn how to do a running record that reflects stepping through learning. For the next term, students

will move into the “thinking” term where they will not only recognize the phases of learning but also metacognition, thinking about the learning.

The theme at the beginning of the year is “learning community” a phase where each classroom focuses on building a strong foundation for learning and for teaching the children that it is their responsibility or obligation to learn as well as their obligation to help others to learning. The second term is spent “questioning.” During this term, students come up with questions rather than answers to help go deeper into the subject matter. Four themes for four terms of the school year build a strong sense of pride among the students and their classmates. “Discipline issues are almost non-existent” says Leigh Stevens. “We are teaching the children who otherwise would be labeled as low decile readers and writers to learn and to thrive in an environment where building a learning community supports the learner better than a strict academic environment” as recounted by Barbara Woods. The academics do come but they come through a spirit of an inquiry based approach to learning.

How do teachers who are new to this philosophy of teaching and learning learn about the Learning Community Philosophy for Children?

Library and Literacy

<https://youtu.be/kTQ8C6fwABE>

Access and Technology

<https://youtu.be/RD3VFUEtV-Q>