

THINKING CLEARLY: metaphor as an aid to complex reasoning.

[Notes prepared for a discussion about future leadership development activities.]

Schools are complex places and we routinely use metaphor to help us make sense of various processes and activities. Importantly, however, the particular metaphor we chose to use has significant influence on the kinds of meaning we search for and the manner in which we proceed.

For example, **organisation**, and its various modifiers, conjures up a kind of coat hanger picture emphasising responsibilities. The word **community** along with its associated adjectives usually implies a flattened hierarchical form focused on relationships.

These are both about structure.

If we wish to focus on what the people do when they are at school, we could use a different image - say incubator- a social incubator. The school provides the conditions, the environment, and the interactions for optimum personal development.

This is about function.

What is **Kiwi Leadership** about? It looks like a structure. In what way would interactions by Kiwi leaders be different from other leaders and what would be the effect on students.

Let's look at where a focus on function might lead. The most pervasive function within a school could probably be called **interaction**. We might wish to further categorise this but for now we will consider the generic notion. Thus we begin a consideration of leadership by exploring the interactions which dominate the daily practice of school leaders rather than perhaps endeavouring to list those activities which fall into one predetermined category or another. As we critique these interactions, which form the bulk of what we do we are seeking to determine whether they are **worthwhile**¹ and whether we are achieving the goals we have set for ourselves.

Now if we could envisage a school where all staff were engaged in this kind of activity - that is regular focussed group sessions of reflective critique around the interactions which defined their professional activity -then we would have a truly unique Kiwi model. We might wish to explain it using the structure set out in the **Kiwi Leadership** paper but the actual activity would be a **function** of the beliefs and culture of the school.

A metaphor for thinking and talking about these kinds of concepts -grouped around 'what people do and might do' - could be **Social Incubator**.

- optimum conditions for personal learning;
- evidence based discussion and critique;
- begins from what we currently do;
- integrates knowledge from multiple sources; and
- builds satisfaction for all.

This view begins with an examination of current professional practice by exploring the nature and effect of the various interactions which carry the concepts and content for learning. These interactions are the knots in the web that support the **social incubator**.

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¹ **worthwhile**: *sufficiently important, rewarding, or valuable to justify time or effort spent.* Collins English Dictionary. 1984

worthwhile also implies the notion of being 'transformed' by what you know. - not just knowledgeable. See R.S.Peters. 'What is an educational process' in *The concept of education* Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd London, 1967.