

'Three Springs' - A Design Concept For A Learning Neighbourhood

People spend a great deal of time - as for years I did myself - talking about how to make 'education' more effective and efficient, or how to do it or give it to more people, or how to reform or humanize it. But to make it more effective and efficient will only be to make it worse, and to help it do even more harm. It cannot be reformed, cannot be carried out wisely or humanely, because its purpose is neither wise nor humane.

John Holt

Fundamental change in education cannot be expected from governments. Economics prevents it. Therefore, we plan to create a learning neighbourhood that will exemplify a fundamentally new vision of education. The neighbourhood will demonstrate that a school can be a fulfilling, self-regulating organisation linked to, and inspired by, authentic enterprise. It will be a place of renewal that will inherently have meaning and purpose, providing children and young people with a stimulating, entrepreneurial, and sustainable environment in which to develop and learn by example.

Essentially the learning neighbourhood is conceived of as a village, containing three interlocking functions: educational, social, and commercial. The working title is 'Three Springs'. The village will be developed as an inspiring exemplar for the wider educational community.

The three centres of the 'Three Springs' enterprise, educational, social, and commercial - and their interconnectedness, are briefly described in the following paragraphs under the headings: 'educational centre', 'centres of enterprise'¹, and 'social centre'².

The educational centre

The nucleus of 'Three Springs' will be a holistic, student-centred school. The village school will provide a genuine heart to the whole enterprise, where physical (KQ), emotional (EQ), intellectual (IQ), and inspirational (SQ) capacities are prized. It will infuse enthusiasm and purpose into the wider 'Three Springs' project. The workshops, homes, farms, businesses, and individuals attached to the neighbourhood, in the enterprise and social centres, will have a direct, practical link to the educational provision.

The school will stand within the pattern of homes and buildings, paths and gardens, fields and 'centres of enterprise'¹ and will provide for fourteen classes of approximately sixteen students each, covering the age range 3.5 to 18 years. It will be a unique educational environment, responsive to an ever-present need for a new vision for education, that will capitalise on, and work with, the committed group of adults living in the social centre and on the drive and expertise of those individuals involved in the 'centres of enterprise'.

The school's buildings and beautiful grounds will be used for community activities such as seasonal festivals and cultural events. They will provide a meeting place for the 'Three Springs' and wider community.

¹ Described in detail on page 6 . ² Described in detail on page 7.

We already have a fully developed, detailed curriculum, which supports the holistic, developmental position we espouse. The curriculum fulfils all the requirements of the national standards of several English speaking States around the world.

The next section provides a sketch of the school's philosophy and lists the theorists who inspire the vision.

The Educational Vision

What makes people smart, curious, alert, observant, competent, confident, resourceful, persistent - in the broadest and best sense, intelligent- is not having access to more and more learning places, resources, and specialists, but being able in their lives to do a wide variety of interesting things that matter, things that challenge their ingenuity, skill, and judgement, and that make an obvious difference in their lives and the lives of people around them.

John Holt

Intellectual and examination prowess have a poor correlation with life success.

Parents and enterprise leaders everywhere are searching for a fresh approach to schooling - schooling that:

values and develops the whole person.

smoothes and encourages the path to further learning.

infuses learning with entrepreneurial zeal and authenticity.

Children are desperate for the same thing too.

In the 'Three Springs' school, education will be delivered in three separate frames on a daily basis. Each frame has a distinct and vital educational purpose. Together the three frames form a comprehensive and viable whole, capable of satisfying the aspirations of the most mindful parents and the most rigorous entrepreneurs. The three frames are:

Integrative Studies (IS)

This is a holistic frame where students develop as complete human beings. In this frame, thematic teaching focuses four major capacities – Inspirational Intelligence (SQ), Rational Intelligence (IQ), Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Kinesthetic Intelligence (KQ) within a single learning context. Like engines firing on all four cylinders rather than on one, students will have a deeply satisfying, broadening, and affirming learning experience, every day. They will experience themselves as whole people and remain deeply engaged with the learning process as a result. The fact that most workplaces do not allow people to function in these major ways has been identified (Danah Zohar) as a major source of employee dissatisfaction and lack of motivation.

Proficiency Lessons (PLs)

This is the pragmatic frame where we will take care of the basic academic dimension of learning. These PLs are to be delivered in traditional 45-minute periods. There are fifteen PLs each week; they target core skills that require repetitive practice. PLs are delivered in written English, basic mathematics, formal music, a 'language other than English (LOTE), and reading. Each of these subjects is allocated three PLs per week; research (Dr. Graham Nuthall, Canterbury, NZ) confirms that this is the optimum rhythm to use when attempting to transfer basic concepts to the long-term memory of students.

These lessons will be infused with reality and purpose arising from frequent contact with the centres of enterprise.

Block Lessons (BLs)

Block Lessons occupy the last 90 minute time-slot each day; there are, therefore, five BLs each week. These lessons are used for three purposes:

to facilitate entrepreneurial, technological education (in particular),
to promote diverse health and physical education opportunities, and
to provide for arts and crafts education.

The learning in this frame is also derived from, and/or linked to, viable adult businesses in the centres of enterprise. Although many of these businesses will be located within Three Springs, others will be accessed in the surrounding communities. Knowledge and skills uncovered by the students as necessary within the enterprises will provide inspiration and material for the PLs, thus grounding them in reality.

School Design Concepts

The school area will feature:

a gatehouse serving as administration, reception, and exhibition area, forming the boundary between the outer enterprise, social and inner school village.

a community hall and common green, linked by natural footpaths to the different learning hamlets.

organic gardens and fields surrounding the hamlets, which will include natural all-weather play areas.

enigmatic monumental works e.g. standing stones and carved tree stumps scattered through the landscape.

defined boundaries where students will pass from the common areas of the school through a significant gate into the security of their own 'hamlet'.

hamlet gardens containing planting and wildlife to encourage student involvement.

animal habitats such as stables, dovecotes, and duck shelters.

nooks and crannies; quiet spaces and features for the eye, ear, and heart to play with
a school cottage for each class within the particular hamlets.

each cottage will contain a kitchen, bathroom, two quiet rooms and a main learning area.

the cottages, inside and out, will have soft contours, large and small windows, and features for encouraging sunny areas and the play of dappled light.

each school cottage will blend and move into its garden with gentle building edges, bay windows, built in seats, and varying levels of indoor and outdoor space.

crafted but not over finished features will abound.

all services within the buildings will be sustainable and sensitive to the wider environment, e.g.

hot water will be made through solar power and wood burning stoves.

water will be pumped by water rams and windmills to tanks for gravity feeding.

power will be generated by water turbine and photovoltaic cells, and stored in transportable batteries.

food waste and effluent will be composted through a dry toilet system.

The Centres of Enterprise

'Three Springs' will provide an attractive location and lease premises to accommodate a variety of small businesses and crafts. The design and presentation of the entire 'enterprise' area will encourage a flow of visitors, customers, and tourists.

The centres will be built as small village work areas, with a winding road, footpaths, lunch areas and a common green, all placed within the Three Springs' village though separated by a natural boundary, e.g. a stream, from the school. The enterprises will be grouped in meaningful themes, such as:

- Food
- Health
- Tourism
- Art & Craft
- Technology
- Performing Arts
- Agriculture

Each theme will act as a nucleus around which allied ventures will be grouped. Thus the 'food' theme might contain gardens, orchards, retail outlets, preserve makers, cafes, meal services; etc.

The workshops will be open-fronted to encourage dialogue and activity between the shop and students or visitors. Thus even casual visitors will have a learning experience.

The buildings will contain sustainable utilities, and the design will flow and change throughout with alcoves, balconies, windows and stairs to different levels. Noise and other polluting factors will be carefully considered and controlled.

Adults, working in the centres of enterprise, will further the wider purpose of the learning community by welcoming the students from the school into their environments. The curriculum and covenants will ensure that this is well managed.

Business or craftspeople will receive:

- A flow of customers and visitors.
- Cross fertilisation from other workshops.
- Beautiful, aesthetically pleasing surroundings.
- A clean, healthy, sustainable environment.
- An inspiring purpose – educating the young.

Business or crafts people will provide:

- Crafted items for the 'Three Springs' village.
- Quality and ambience to the larger village.
- Lease monies to the school body.
- Learning opportunities for the students and visitors.

The social centre

'Three Springs' will provide a small number of residential allotments for purchase or lease within the boundaries, and would plan to obtain further residential blocks and/or properties in the neighbourhood that might also be sold to families who are attracted to the area.

A covenant will unite these residential properties with the ethos of the school. In this way 'Three Springs' will ensure a consistent approach to the close environment, and encouragement towards a larger village style of settlement.

In brief, the covenant will ensure that:

Appropriate technology is used throughout the homes and buildings: solar heating for water and home comfort, alternative power generation, and ecologically sound effluent disposal.

Designs will make use of environmentally friendly materials, local and recycled products, earth or straw based walls, to create healthy, safe, energy efficient homes.

Home and garden design will be of the sort that encourages imagination and beauty, and a sense of the social working of form and structure within a village setting.

Residents of the wider village will receive:

- Community life.
- A beautiful environment.
- Healthy sustainable surroundings.
- Opportunities to join local work places.
- A sense of purpose and meaning.

Residents of the wider village will provide:

- Aesthetic ambience through building and landscape.
- Capital return from properties for the school.
- Learning opportunities for the school students.

Legal Structure

It is intended to form an Incorporated Society of at least twelve persons, drawn from those who are most interested in the commencement of this vision of a learning village. Competent people, who are willing to serve, will be found with wide and varied expertise in management, trusteeship, education, accountancy and legal areas.

A management board will be appointed, directly responsible to the Society, for the administration of the neighbourhood, and the conduct of the School in accordance with the relevant Education Acts and other statutes. The management board will consist of three main facilitators, over the three centres of the enterprise.

Funding

Endowments will enable 'Three Springs' to have a healthy, sustainable life for the school, and will allow independent operation from the State.

If the school can establish itself in this way, the plan has income generating components that will ensure a sustainable future. It will mean that all school buildings and facilities can be put in place, surrounding land may be protected and held for future use, and the seed for village areas - both commercial and residential - can be initiated.

How can you get involved?

We need people who can help with the development, design, and actualisation of 'Three Springs'. If this vision lights your imagination, register your interest, your areas of expertise, and possible ways you could help, by emailing:

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Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is 'schooled' to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavour are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question.

Ivan Illich Deschooling Society