



Reflections at Year's End: Cultivating a Culture of Learning and Belonging



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As the calendar year comes to a close, I find myself juggling a multitude of tasks, feeling both excited and anxious. Yet, amidst the hustle, I cherish quiet mornings with a cup of coffee, holiday music playing in the background, and taking crisp, sunny walks with my pups. These moments offer a chance to pause and reflect. While reflection can happen any time of the year, there's something about the year's end that naturally prompts me to look back on the past months—both personally and professionally.

During a recent walk, my thoughts drifted to my professional role as an educator and the importance of culture in schools. Much of the work I've done

globally this year has centered on school improvement, which invariably starts with culture. Whether you're preparing for a holiday break mid-school year like in the USA, or closing out the 2024 school year in Australia, it's an opportune time to reflect on your culture. Use this reflection to learn, make commitments, and consider new approaches for the coming year.



The pups: Hattie and Pickles

My reflections led me to our five key capabilities for success, which highlight the essence of culture—*“who we are and what we believe as individuals and a system, and how those identities and beliefs show up in practice and learning”* (McEachen & Kane, Measuring Human Return). Central to this is creating a culture of learning, belonging, and high expectations for all. This foundation is critical to meeting the needs of students, staff, and the community. However, merely stating this goal isn't

System Capabilities

• Understanding Your System

• Engaging Learners, Parents, and Communities as Real Partners

• Identifying and Measuring what's Important

• Leading for Deep and Sustainable Change

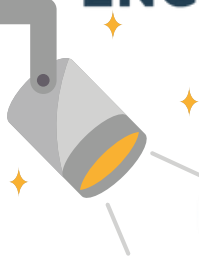
• Creating a Culture of Learning, Belonging, and High Expectations for all

enough; it must be ingrained in every aspect of our work to truly make a difference for our students.

As you reflect at the end of the year, whether alone, with colleagues, students, staff, or your school community, consider these questions to drive meaningful changes:

- **What aspects of our culture foster a sense of belonging for all learners?**
- **How can we ensure that students never feel the need to hide who they are, what engages or troubles them, and how they contribute?**
- **What steps can we take to improve upon, let go of, or innovate our practices to better support every student?**

Let your reflections serve as a catalyst to enhance, innovate, and create a culture where every learner feels valued and connected. After all, if it's good for kids, we must find a way to make it happen.



AMERICAN
★INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL★

Partner Schools Spotlight

Partner: **American International School**

Grade Levels: **Prep through Grade 12**

Location: **Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong**

AIS in Hong Kong provides education from early childhood through grade 12, serving approximately 900 students. In the 2023-24 school year, AIS partnered with The Learner First (TLF) for the first time. A dedicated "change team" of 15 staff members participated in Learning Design workshops to explore the Contributive Learning Framework and its alignment with their mission and goals.

Building on this foundation, the 2024-25 school year has seen an expansion of our partnership. The full AIS teaching staff is now engaged in these workshops, focusing on fostering a sense of belonging for all students. Our approach emphasizes holistic learning experiences, integrating academic knowledge and self-understanding into everyday learning. By weaving these elements together, AIS is committed to creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment where every student can thrive.

In our first workshop days in October, the staff focused on learning culture.

“The more you contribute, the more you feel a sense of belonging.”

Anita Simpson, Head of School
American International School

Belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group. It is when an individual can be their authentic self.

Cornell University

How can AIS enhance the learning environment and experiences for students to promote self-understanding, leading to greater self-confidence and a sense of belonging?

Staff participated in activities designed to help them reflect on evidence of self-understanding within their learning environments. They also brainstormed and discussed ways to enhance these environments to foster a sense of belonging for all students.



Individuals shared evidence of what visitors would observe in their school or classroom environments that promote self-understanding.



Division groups utilized the Contributive Learning Culture Cards centered on Self-Understanding to initiate reflective conversations about their current practices and to plan their next steps.



Staff participated in an “environment walk” across the school, capturing observations and reflections on self-understanding. They then synthesized their findings and shared them with the entire group to provide perspectives, reflect, and begin action planning for improvements.

CHECK OUT THESE CONTRIBUTIONS

These are articles, media, resources, etc. our team have come across that have **#contributed** to our learning and wanted to share them with you!

Microsoft 365 Copilot is your AI assistant for education.

"It can boost productivity, amplify creativity, and securely empower everyone in the organization."

Brave Leadership: Shaping Education with AI, Innovation and Vision with Yong Zhang

NAESP Resource Hub Article
(National Association of Elementary School Principals (USA))

Global
Evidence

Embark on a journey to align teaching, learning and leadership to strengthen curricular outcomes, improve well-being for all, and empower school communities to achieve collective goals.

Measurable



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