Being a principal in the year 2000
by Bambi Betts

Is the role of the principal any different now than it has been for the past decade? Should I be doing anything different, or just the same things differently, or the same things the same way?

Of course, there is never one right answer. But it is clearly the role of the principal to provide the leadership that leads to improved learning. Where will we look for guidance in the coming decade?

Here are my "predictions" about some of the key areas that are ve ry likely to impact the way we do our work in international schools. Some have been with us for a while, but will take on fuller meaning; others have been vague notions, which will mature into reality.

Character education: A carry over from the past decade, as well as episodically from several other decades, this one is here to stay. Does your school have a comprehensive program, which establishes standards for both teachers and students, describes where and how these standards are taught, as well as ways of assessing them? Schools in this decade will need to clarify their missions: are we equally committed to both academic and personal development? Or, in practice, is one taking precedence over the other.

Integrated Curriculum: This trend has been given "lip service" by many schools over the past decade. But as we progress through the next ten years, the concept of individual disciplines and subject-based skills will once again be heavily challenged. Why? The concept of teaching individual disciplines is rooted in a learning theory, which assumes that acquisition of knowledge is the key component in learning.

There is growing evidence that although the teacher may teach individual bits of information and related skills, the learner rarely processes information this way. It is the natural tendency of the brain to seek connections. As we become more adept at understanding these connections, our curriculum and teaching are both more likely to reflect that understanding.

Learning versus 'schooling: This is one of my own. The past century has seen education largely through the "schoolhouse" lens. But schools no longer have a monopoly on the single largest commodity they were designed for: information giving. Information is now in the "free market." Students are no longer dependent on the school as the primary source of information; the whole concept of "schooling" in a place called school will come into question.

Schools will be forced to answer the question, what is our primary role? The answer to this question will force profound, fundamental changes in the way we educate, where we educate, and what we call an "educated" person. "Learning" will replace the narrower

concept of "schooling;" the notion of "learning anywhere, anytime" will become the basis for the design of the educational system.

Obviously the strides in information technology and telecommunications will continue to be significant catalysts for this shift. Educational leaders will need to stay extremely close to these. But there will be other, equally powerful forces to consider.

Definition of Intelligence: During the past few years, educational researchers and theorists have posited that the way learning takes place and therefor what is meant by intelligence may be radically different than traditional belief suggests. Are there multiple ways of being intelligent? Are they all equally critical? As the definition changes, the notion of being a 'thinker" will become more valued than being a 'knower'. And learning and teaching for understanding will become the centerpiece of the curriculum. Strong problem-solving strategies, ability to analyze and act on results and the ability to ask essential questions will also feature in our new definition of intelligence.

Opening the dialogue on these issues at your school should be a catalyst for improved learning and a demonstration of true educational leadership. Visit the PTC chat room to hear the ideas of your colleagues on these and other issues which can assist you in your role as a principal.