

## **‘Educating Karen’ Sabbatical Report**

*‘A child educated only at school is an uneducated child.’*

*-George Santayana*




# Sabbatical Focus

'To complete professional reading around current educational practice and theory  
and attend the National College for School Leadership 2012  
Annual Conference in Birmingham.'

Karen Brisco Principal  
Omata School U4 Full Primary New Plymouth  
Sabbatical: June - August 2012







# Mission



-  Recharge and Travel
-  Attend NCSL Conference in Birmingham
-  Read and Reflect

My sincere appreciation to the Omata Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical application and the Ministry of Education for its generous contribution to the scheme. I would especially like to thank Pat Murphy, acting principal in my absence, and all the staff for keeping the school running so smoothly.

# Activities

-  Travel to New York, London, Birmingham, Oxford, Paris, Carcassonne, Montolieu, Antibes, Florence, Venice, Rome and Singapore.
-  Attend NCSL Conference in Birmingham
-  Visit London School: Thomas's, Fulham
-  Professional Reading
-  Sabbatical report: keynote presentation
-  Share my keynote report with my principal cluster group

# Recharge and Travel

I do not think we can underestimate the value of taking some time to step out from the mantle of principalship, or for that matter any job that we do year in year out. Leaving behind the responsibilities, saying no to the temptations of staying 'in touch' and not reading emails! This was harder than I thought; getting right away helped. The first part of my sabbatical was to travel and then combine that with attendance at the NCSL conference and a school visit.

Travel overseas freed me from 'having, or needing, to know'. As a precise, highly organised, in control person, this was a revelation. After the first few days in New York, the layers of 'the job' peeled away and I reveled in the now. My perspective was receptive; soaking in the moments and nourishing my soul with new connections, new conversations; new modus operandi. Time to do something completely different was such a pleasure and a privilege. I really thought I would miss everything, but found other things to occupy my mind. I noticed that as soon as I got back to New Zealand, I did start to think about the school and what was happening.

## Why take a sabbatical?

I would not hesitate in recommending to long-serving principals, that they take a sabbatical. The realisation of how much stress we carry around, has made me more aware of the need to actually not take on so much stress. 'Don't sweat the small stuff', is now more my state of mind than just a throw away line. The increased engagement with my job as a result of taking a sabbatical, far outweighed any negatives. By keeping lines of communication open, and being honest about what you plan to get out of your time away, it can give you an entirely new perspective on your work, which can have a positive effect on your team's performance.

I do not think a sabbatical would be the best option for a principal who is having any 'acute' issues within their school, or has no one to step up into their position while they are away. The enormity of picking up the role on their return may be counter productive to the benefits of sabbatical. There is a certain amount of disconnect on first return to work; from both the knowledge of what has happened during your absence, and from the people around you as the team dynamics may have been disturbed.



# Conference



National College for School Leadership 'Seizing Success' 2012 held in Birmingham

## Highlights



**Vic Goddard** Principal of Passmores Academy Essex whose school was featured in a reality TV series, 'Educating Essex'. The show followed a group of GCSE students and the staff who teach them for seven weeks. The school was fitted with 65 fixed cameras – from the corridors to the canteen, and from the head-teacher's office to the detention hall.

### Messages:

The media's agenda is not the same as yours : Good news stories don't necessarily sell

Once a story goes public, it is not yours anymore, and you have no control - their school website went from having 80 hits a day to 80,000!

Of the 25,000 emails received, only 4 were negative (but those were the ones that Vic found hard to shake).

When the spotlight comes on you, the loneliness of the job is magnified.

Vic had to help teachers to become more resilient.

Appreciate the magnificent job teachers do and value the small interactions that go on daily around the school.



# Conference Highlights



**Ben Levin** Professor and Research Chair in Educational Leadership and Policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

## Messages:

'It is not reasonable to say that schools can overcome all societies inequalities, but we can make an important contribution to diminish the effects.'

Ben outlined the educational challenges that we are facing around the world today: we have better outcomes than ever before, in a broader range of areas than ever before, but with more students and less equity than ever, and serious resource constraints. (This message resonates with us in NZ as we grapple with high achievement internationally for most students but inequity for our Maori/Pasifika students.)

*Every* school in the system needs to provide *every* student with a fair opportunity.

We need to talk about '**high quality teaching, not high quality teachers**' - the skill, not the person.

The skills can be taught and learned, and we should expect teachers to work to gain them.

Schools should be places where student outcomes are good, where students feel engaged, valued, intellectually stimulated, safe and included.

The importance of every person feeling known and valued in a school.

Have a small number of clear goals; no more than three.

A great system relies on collaboration as well as competition - sharing knowledge to better serve each child.

Everyone should care about every school's success.

# Conference Highlights



## **Steve Munby** National College Chief Executive

### **Messages:**

Important to get the balance between inclusivity and authority when leading in our changing education system.

Without collaboration our system has no hope of improving.

Using the analogy of 'power' (the drive to get the job done, to push things to a conclusion) and 'love' (the drive to connect things, to bring people together, to unify), Steve stated that as leaders we cannot choose one or the other, we must choose both.

### **Four Leadership Tensions:**

- Pacesetter or coach? - be both and help teachers cope with the pace.
- Being challenging, and being open to being challenged, - Teachers want a challenge, they don't want to coast. Alongside the challenge we should model taking on challenges ourselves.
- Competition or collaboration? - We need both. We hide our competitive edge but it is there; it keeps us on our toes and we learn from others. We need collaboration so the overall the system improves. Collaboration doesn't work when schools huddle together, endorsing each others' views and keeping one another comfortable.
- Being consistent while being adaptive; if a system is working well why shouldn't other schools adopt it especially when it is based on sound evidence. Why do we feel the need to find out for ourselves and not accept sound practice? Strategies that travel well, travel with nuance.



# Thomas's, Fulham



Visit to private school in London

Fees £5,195 per term

Ages 4-13    Hours for students (yrs 3-6) 8:30am -4pm    Class size 20

A holistic, broad curriculum is offered at Thomas's. Places are very keenly contested by families and there is a selection process.

**Foundation :** 'Happiness through friendship, Opportunity through broad curriculum, Expertise through specialist teaching staff, Confidence through achievement, Contentment through fulfillment, Openness through active partnership with parents'

Students from 4 years old are taught by specialist teachers in French, ICT, Art, Ballet, Drama, Music and PE. In the junior and middle classes, academic subjects are taught by form teachers, whilst in the senior classes, students are taught by subject specialists.

**Facilities:** There were specialist rooms for art, ICT, dance, fencing and PE as well as other spaces for learning groups. Whilst there was only a small concrete space for outside play, there was a large public green space across the road that the students used regularly.

**Staff:** Teachers were nearly all overseas trained, either from NZ, Australia or Canada.

**Curriculum:** National testing was in progress the day I visited. Teachers spoken to did not feel pressure of the national testing regime. Their students gain placements at the school through their aptitude for learning, they focus on delivering an exciting, broad curriculum and gain high achievement. Funding is not an issue and there seems to be plenty of opportunity employ extra specialist staff and have the latest equipment. I was impressed by the focus on a broad, stimulating curriculum making the most of students interests. Annual trips and EOTC experiences sounded impressive, for instance; the year 6's off for a week in France, the Year 8's on and outward bound course. Optional trips skiing, trekking in Nepal, choir tours and more are offered. There was an emphasis on 'The Arts' with a variety of specialist teachers being employed.

**Reflections:** I thought this school was excellent; it was similar to my current school but with unlimited funds. They value and extended students skills and interests in the broadest way, they value the arts and physical activities, they use specialist teachers with a passion for their subjects, they provide holistic education and engaged their community of parents, they value and celebrate achievement and set high expectations. Children were happy and their learning outcomes were of a very high standard. Parental pressure to get top marks so that students gained entry into the best high schools/colleges was strong and this appeared to be a pressure point for teachers.

New Zealand state schools can provide much of the richness offered here, with the New Zealand Curriculum as our foundation document allowing all children to have access to rich learning and a teacher inquiry model that expects excellent, dynamic teaching.

# Read

## **Outliers:** The Story of Success by Malcolm Gladwell

My Rating: ◆◆◆◆◇ -easy read

‘Why do some people achieve so much more than others? This is a stunning book, taking us on an intellectual journey through the world of ‘outliers’- the best and the brightest, the most famous and the most successful. Malcolm Gladwell asks the question: What makes high-achievers different?’

Malcolm presents the idea that we pay too much attention to what successful people are like, and too little attention to where they are from: that is, their culture, their family, their generation, and the idiosyncratic experiences of their upbringing. Gladwell explains the secrets of software billionaires, what it takes to be a great soccer player, why Asians are good at math, and what made the Beatles the greatest rock band.

As an educationalist, what can we glean from the book that will help us narrow those gaps in achievement? While some of Gladwell’s assumptions are tenuous, there are common threads and logic behind why some people become successful; many times it points to ‘the right place at the right time’ scenario or having the opportunity of 10,000 hours to practice your craft at a young age. The main part of Gladwell's premise is that, how hard one works (and is willing to work), combined with circumstance, indicate one's likelihood of success. Not groundbreaking news, but I recommend this book as a thought provoking, engaging read.

# Outliers



THE STORY OF SUCCESS

MALCOLM  
GLADWELL

#1 bestselling author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*

# Read

## New Kinds of Smart:

How the Science of  
Learnable Intelligence is Changing Education  
by Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas

My Rating: ◆◆◆◆◇ -challenging read

‘20th Century schools presumed that students' intelligence was largely fixed. 21st century science says that intelligence is expandable - and in a variety of ways. New Kinds of Smart argues that this shift in the way we think about young minds opens up hitherto unexplored possibilities for education.’

Each chapter presents practical examples, tools and templates so that each new strand of thinking can be woven into their work as teachers and into their lives as learners.

Topics covered in this book include many types of ‘intelligences’ such as; expandable, intuitive, composite, distributed, practical, strategic, ethical and social. Guy and Bill help to apply the theory into classroom practices and this is a valuable resource for schools and teachers who are seeking ways to extend their learners thinking and achievement. We know that great teachers are great learners, and this is a book for great teachers who want to continue to improve their pedagogy and take heed of the new findings in the areas of neuroscience and learning theory. I like the way Bill and Guy explain the theory and then tie it to practical examples that teachers can use. I also think the book opens our minds to accepting the notion of ‘learnable intelligence’ and steers us away from having negative assumptions limiting students attainment.

Tying Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton’s work into Helen Timperley’s ideas set out in ‘Realizing the Power of Professional Learning’, teachers who have the belief that being smart is something that is essentially learned, have an educational imperative to engage in professional learning. Alternately those teachers who believe intelligence is innately ‘fixed’, have little reason to engage in professional learning to make their pedagogy more effective. It is a fundamental mind-shift for some people and it is important that we help all teachers understand how intelligence has complex attributes that are shaped by learning.

New Kinds of Smart

HOW THE SCIENCE OF LEARNABLE  
INTELLIGENCE IS CHANGING EDUCATION



# Altered States



Sabbatical gave me the space to step out and take in the 'big picture'. The job is 24/7 in our thoughts and the week extends into weekends and holidays. Often we are moving from one issue to another in quick succession. It feels a bit like a juggling act at times, moving from one framework to another eg: from discussing a weekend football incident with a parent, taking a phone call from special education, querying an invoice from the electrician, celebrating students' learning, listening to a staff member's concern, reviewing building plans, juggling timetables and welcoming visitors

-all before morning break.

I got to leave the juggling back at school, and have space in my head to really be challenged in my thinking about life and work and to get up-to-date with the professional reading that I was just not finding the time to really get absorbed in.

*'If in the last few years you haven't discarded a major opinion or acquired a new one, check your pulse.'* ~Gelett Burgess

# Reflection



- Realisation of how entrenched our habits become.
- My new goal is to consciously break habits more often. Travel stimulates the senses, strengthens relationships, widens perspectives and forces a total disconnect from work.
- Global tensions in education are emerging; the political intrusion / agenda, the balance of competition and collaboration, of holistic and narrow curriculum, of formative and summative high stakes assessments. View Ken Robinson's latest talk in the US: [vimeo.com/58069426](https://vimeo.com/58069426)
- Crucial to my well-being and leadership is to be invigorated: keeping up-to-date with current perspectives in education; feeling inspired, challenged and ready to continue to face the challenges of principalship with greater understanding. I have made the shift from thinking about professional *development* to thinking more about professional *learning*; the active process of evidence-based inquiry.
- Transitioning back to work after sabbatical was more of a challenge than I thought, I found it hard to focus for that first term back. It was the adjustment in pace that threw me most. It took a whole term to really feel like I was back to full speed. The slight disconnect from people and the events that had occurred in my absence was not unsurmountable and benefits far outweigh any disadvantages.
- The reaction of the parent community pleasantly surprised me as they were keen to talk about what I had been doing and were positive about the opportunity that I had. Especially interested were the many families that come from Europe. We delighted in talking about the experiences and the places I had been to. We had discovered an authentic connection and new conversations began.

# Final Thoughts



- Take time for life's desserts
- Bring the richness of your experience back with you
- Keep a balanced 'work/life' diet - in fact don't think of it as separate -work is part of the life that you love; but not the whole of your life.
- If you are eligible for a sabbatical and you have confidence in your staff and school; apply!

*'There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.'* ~Nelson Mandela

# References

## **National College for School Leadership**

Triumph Road, Nottingham, England

© National College for School Leadership, an executive agency of the Department for Education

The current UK government took office on 11 May 2010. Some of the content on this site may reflect policies of the previous government.

NCSL: <http://education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/index>

Steve Munby's speech: <http://forms.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/current2012/seizing-success-2012-steve-munby-speech.pdf>

## **Educating Essex**

Channel 4 Educating Essex programme <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/educating-essex>

Daily Mail article <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2040729/Educating-Essex-What-sort-example-set-children.html>

## **'New Kinds of Smart' by Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton**

McGraw-Hill Education,

Open University Press, London 2010

ISBN: 978-0335236183

## **'Outliers: The Story of Success'**

by Malcolm Gladwell

Back Bay Books 2011

ISBN: 978-0316017930

## **'Realising the Power of Professional Learning'**

by Helen Timperley

Expanding Educational Horizons

McGraw-Hill

Open University Press 2011