

Renwick School

Blenheim

Marlborough

**PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL
REPORT**

Term 4, 2019

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Renwick School Board of Trustees for supporting my application for sabbatical leave.

I also acknowledge my senior staff and other school staff, who stepped up in my absence to ensure the smooth operation of our school.

I thank the Ministry of Education for making sabbatical leave available to principals. The opportunity I have had to be able to just take time out, to refresh, reflect, meet people and explore in more depth a development opportunity for our school has been invaluable.

Special thanks to the schools and principals I visited in the Singapore, Melbourne Victoria and NZ.

To all the Teachers, Deputy Principals, Principals/Head Teachers and organization representatives who welcomed me into your places of work, were generous with your time and helpful in my cause, thank you for your passion, pride and enthusiasm.

“Leadership must provide the dance floor and pick the right music to get colleagues dancing together and building trusting relationships”

Chan, Chi Wai 20

I am curious about principal professional and instructional leadership. I am also very interested in examining the extent to which genuine collaboration is contributing to school leadership/improvement, teacher capability, building a sense of equity, excellence and belonging and therefore positive outcomes for students.

Overview

I was fortunate to meet with some fine principals and educational leaders from three jurisdiction's over a period of 7 weeks. I discussed with them their views on leadership in their system context and explored key questions around instructional and professional leadership, collaboration and knowing the impact of leadership on teaching capability and student outcomes.

Summary from Principals & Educational Leaders I Met With

Singapore System

98% pass rate for UE

Not chasing grades

Re-focussing system emphasis on 'Future Readiness' students

Life wide, life deep, life long learners

Strengthening focus on the system to develop students who are creators, innovators, value creation, curious, resilient.

Role of school leader - centripetal force and centrifugal force of leadership

The centrifugal force keeps everything in check and maintains focus around the central vision - the Singapore MOE Vision/Mission

The centripetal force is the disruptor - that challenges and creates but ultimately the centrifugal force brings new innovation alignment to the vision.

“The learning outcomes of the student must exceed the total delivery of the school resources available to them” David Ng

Definition of Successful Education System:

“A successful education system is able to develop future-ready individuals who will continue to learn beyond graduation, take on future lifework, and thrive in a changing society and environment.” NIE Singapore

This multi-dimensional framework (Annex 1) re-defines educational success (world-class education). Being future-ready implies that learning outcomes must be dynamic and aligned to new realities that emerge over time. The framework consists of the following dimensions that provide an integrated approach to **define educational success and future-ready learner outcomes:**

- Dimension 1: Purposes of schooling (Development for life-long learning, lifework, and living)
- Dimension 2: Time (Past, present, and future)
- Dimension 3: Contexts (Economics, Social, Environmental – *technological is integral in all the three primary contexts*).
- Dimension 4: Practices¹ (Teaching and learning practices, community practices, school leadership and management practices, inquiry practices)

The Singapore system is re-defining direction through a future focussed lens built around the economy, the need to build environmental/resource sustainability. See below

Fundamental shifts in the economy, social, and environment at the global, regional, and national levels are redefining how we work, live, and learn in Singapore. For example, rapid technological advancements globally are reshaping business models where organizations compete on intangible assets such as intellectual property, data and user networks. Another shift is Singapore’s ageing population and low birth rate. This demographic change will lead to a shrink in the growth of the local workforce and places strain on the social fabric of Singapore. With religious extremism and terrorism on the rise globally, Singapore faces the challenge of maintaining peace and harmony in its religious diverse society. On the environmental front, Singapore needs to balance its urbanization need for resources and create sustainable practices to reduce carbon footprint.

All these challenges have fundamental implications for education in Singapore.

Victoria System

School Councils - elected body of parents with no legislative authority, but do bring pressure to bear on principals if given opportunity. Can be divisive/polarising but also incredibly supportive. Does create some vulnerability within the system where personal agendas are pushed.

Principals have full authority and almost full autonomy.

Curriculum development contextual to reflect school/community need/culture/dynamic

Compliance creates pressures of time and takes away from leadership.

Competition between schools is significant and largely focussed on attracting numbers to grow rolls.

Secondary has more scope to bring an entrepreneurial approach to develop funding streams, property and programme opportunities – One Principal has 3 businesses operating on the school site - International students, uniform shop, facility hire - funds brought in enable wider programme offering, social worker employment.

High expectations from communities - can be very stressful for staff to meet demands - a number of staff on stress leave. One principal was the 6th in two years of their school - now been there for 7 years.

The system isn't necessarily responsive to risk - as demonstrated above - this school went through a very tough time until principal was finally appointed to carry forward.

The Dept, centre, govt set achievement targets and schools are expected to incorporate in strategic and annual plans and develop ways and approaches to achieve/work towards.

Communities of practice enable collaboration - networks of principals working together supported by Senior Education Improvement Leaders who oversee/mentor principals along with Practice Leaders.

New Zealand System

Secondary Sector

Simplified timetables - specialist subjects delivered in variety ways. One which was interesting - 2 x 100 minute sessions per week each - 5 subjects and 10 sessions in all.

- Wednesdays - Impact Project - all students
- Two 100 minute tutorials per week

Organises the school to provide students with personal leadership of their learning opportunities.

Decile 10 Schools - Amazing facilities - Technology rich and students enabled/empowered to use to support and drive their learning.

UDL - design for learning - co learning emphasized and working towards

Primary Sector

Focus on simple things - what is the data/evidence, build shared understandings, strengthen practice, build the conversations - know learners, listen to learners - advocate for kids and don't sweat the small stuff - keep eye on the wide view

Shared timetable so all doing same thing at same time

Listen to kids and hear their world

Kids drive strategic planning - What do you want for your school? To be learning? Your future?

Vision building with staff - build a clear line of sight for all to hold to - team up to.

Ask questions like - why do we exist? What must we do? What does that look like?

Want a good life for all kids with opportunity like all kids to succeed.

Develop a theme for each Year eg: "It's our time to shine" then develop a question for each term to draw on this theme - whole school involved in Inquiry to explore, investigate and share their learning. The question is tailored to the age groups so that it is common across the school but understood at each level.

Principals drive the school and explore/manipulate the system to best meet school/community needs. Flexibility exists and good leadership/principalship finds ways to get the most from the system for their schools/staff and kids.

Disrupt students and staff - planned disruption that aligns to the theme and the term focus question - or just serves as the lever to promote a different type of thinking. Eg: a disco, swap teachers around for the day, vandalise classrooms Be creative and link to a clear purpose in a planned way.

Stuff happens because of good leadership and is not necessarily system driven.

Elections every year in term 4 - now an annual event/integral part of the school when the school leaders are elected - one week focus.

Kids deserve a good life, our job is to facilitate the learning, set the standards and create the conditions where they can experience different stuff and grow into happy, fulfilled, good people.

Maori Medium

Didn't aspire to principalship - it was the experience of teaching, RTM then back to teaching that brought tumuaki to principalship at age.

Education has to be different as the mainstream system has failed generations

Examples of this is 'whanaungatanga with whanau through a suspension process including kai - must remove any conflict so that all can sit together, know each other and work together for solutions.

System - have to work the system constantly in whare kura environment

Seek own self professional growth opportunities.

Must develop total relevance to Maori Medium

Excellence & Equity is a constant conversation - whanaungatanga reigns in community relationships

Must work the system to get the most from it - all staff are learning leaders - all staff have MUs as all are responsible for leadership. - Operate as a team for all decision making.

Whanau wrote curriculum over 2 years - whanau very attached and involved with kura.

Tamariki are taught - This is why you sing! This is how you stand! Your tupuna stood like this!

This powerful stuff reflecting strong leadership in context with relevance to school culture and history.

Staff retreat every year to review year, ask questions, what did we set out to do? Have we achieved what we said we would do? What didn't we do? What now?

Staff passion is drawn out with selected work two days per week - student select their topic and work with that teacher - taking time to even out according to student selection need over popularity.

Compliance/MOE requirements get in way taking up time. SMS for Maori medium. H&S - OMG

Devolve MOE - take back education leadership to regions. Remove competition from schools and find a way to connect education seamlessly from ECE to tertiary using Kahui Ako model.

Kahui Ako for Maori medium

Some themes coming through

- **Care Leadership**
- **Central focus on what is best for kids**
- **Kindness - being kind**
- **Beyond school - mentoring/planning/care**
- **Enrolling students for life**
- **School visions well articulated - driving ownership and collective leadership**
- **Our system has the flexibility to manoeuvre within - have to know the system first - this can be problematic for new principals**
- **How does the system adapt to meet the changes that are impacting - increased student anxiety, social media, behaviour**
- **Collaboration doesn't just happen, it must be deliberate and led to liberate the professional conversation**
- **Equity, excellence and belonging is much more evident in NZ contexts driven in part by our cultural diversity and genuine focus on inclusivity**

So How do our systems compare?

Having spent time in a good number of schools in conversation with principals and education leaders it is clear that all three systems are high performing however, there are some key differences that I wish to note here.

Singapore has 400 schools, has one Initial Teacher Education provider and whilst the Singapore Ministry of Education is the steward of the system, it is clear that the National Institute of Education is a powerful agency in teacher education and development therefore having immense impact on the system. This direct line of teacher training and in-service PLD ensures clarity and coherence in a very driven system. Add to this the strong culture of respect for education and all its players by the population and it is no surprise that achievement rates are so high in Singapore. They are not chasing grades.

What I have come to know through my research is that Singapore is in the early stages of setting a new education agenda which is focussing very much on the impact of economic and global shifts and the need to build a sustainable nation with the resources they have. Future Ready Skills are being fed into the system – such things as a focus on team work, problem solving, inquiry, resilience are becoming more specific within the teaching curriculum. These are packaged as lifelong learning, life work, examining past and present to set the future and are being described and articulated as nation building goals.

These very same shifts are impacting on the levels of collaboration within the system. Whilst very early days in Singapore, they are looking beyond their shores at other jurisdiction's for practices and methodologies to support their new agenda. New Zealand is one of those countries they are beginning to look to.

This is powerful stuff that continues to drive high performance and achievement across the Singapore education system.

The Victorian system is very different again. The system is very top down in terms of the system stewards overseeing what is actually happening in schools. Whilst there are strong similarities in this approach with Singapore, school leaders have more autonomy to lead and innovate in their schools in Victoria.

The leaders I met with have experienced a degree of frustration from the department as often compliance pressures rise above professional leadership, collaboration and innovation that give rise to better outcomes for students. Whilst the autonomy is good, there is a strong sense of being done to which disrupts school leaders from their core business.

Some innovative thinking has led to schools driving future focussed programmes and opportunities which are rich and powerful teaching and learning pathways.

Partnership with Business and Industry is an example of this for a group of secondary schools. With funding of over \$200k over the next three years this programme provides every student with the opportunity to have a business or industry mentor in Melbourne/Australia, to be able to connect with them, visit them in their workplace and begin to build an understanding of that business/industry and the potential roles within that might attract that student into work post their formal education.

Equity funding has been secured to support student needs. Whilst the schools I visited were in reasonably affluent areas some do have neglect issues - both parents working, lack of attention, too much free time at home to choose/lack of direction from parents. These schools have employed social workers who see up to 80 students per week. Additional funding for these initiatives is through the school developed businesses;

- *International students - (100 pa)*
- *Uniform Shop*
- *Hire of facilities*

On the collaboration front, four regions of Melbourne are divided into Network Communities of Practice. These are seen as mechanisms for change and are incredibly varied with a compliance rather than a progressive agenda.

The school leaders I met with are in Network Communities of Practice with three or four other principals/school. They have chosen to focus on writing and have co-ordinated a conference for their entire staffs, brought in keynotes and built momentum around this PLD together. This collectivity is a powerful mover for building teacher capability and capacity whilst they are still in the early stages of this development. The collaboration is building, but it is more problematic when this is driven from outside rather than within.

The network collaboration between the principals in my sample is working because the principals involved chose to work together, have respect and have built relational trust for each other. They collectively viewed this as foundational for the success of their collaboration. Their next agreed steps is to broaden this collaboration across their respective school staffs.

In Aotearoa NZ we are by no means perfect, but we do seem to have a blend of what I have experienced in both Singapore and Victoria. As I write, I expect any reader to know our NZ system well, however, I visited a lot of schools and principals in NZ and came away in awe of the passion, care and innovative practices that I observed and was so generously shared with me. "Number 8 wire mentality", this is so very evident in NZ school leadership.

The diversity of our schools and the creative and caring leadership that prevails is what gives our schools and our system colour. Equity remains a big issue as does strengthening that sense of belonging for all our students within a system that is still immature and fighting themes of unconscious bias and expectations of excellence for all. This said, I met with experienced and successful principals working across a range of decile secondary, primary, intermediate and Maori Medium contexts. In every case, it was clear to me who the instructional and professional leader was. The vision that was being articulated was well understood, coherent and linked to overall school strategy. Most of all, there was a strong sense of team, that these students deserve the best we have got to give and that mediocre is not ok.

Not all schools were in what I would call strong collaborations with other schools, although some were in well established, high functioning Kahui Ako. Most certainly, where a school was an active partner in the Kahui Ako, there were clear drivers that were focussed on growing teacher and leadership capability, there was genuine sharing of practices and there was evidence of genuine challenge of practices and of the system. This was evidenced in the professional conversations that prevailed in some staffrooms as well as the interactions I was privileged to be a part of with principals.

A feature of all my visits and meetings with school leaders was deep reflective practice about their work. The 'why' of the work, the thinking beyond the classroom to lifelong impact on learners. Thinking through consequences of deliberate acts of leadership and the potential unintended consequences of these acts of leadership. Knowing their learners – their staff and insisting that their staff know their learners – their students. Examining practice and thinking about impact, realising potential and having expectations that elevate and extend self and others. These are the very processes that effective leaders must go through not only in building their capacity as leaders, but also building leadership capacity in general.

In Summary

The Singapore system is very organised, very direct from training to the classroom with a single provider for PLD. The system is curated under an umbrella of respect, high expectations and very focussed on nation building. The system is producing results of high achievement and is now stretching into soft skills but not losing its grip on what has already been achieved and how. Global economic and social impacts are being recognised as future system drivers with a clear focus on sustainability on resources and function as a nation.

Victoria is more liberal in many aspects of its system with strong collaboration initiatives and more opportunity to challenge the system. The levels of autonomy for principals are similar to NZ, however, there are some strong compliance pressures which frustrate and slow innovation and creativity.

Excellent partnerships are being developed with business and industry to mentor and grow student aspiration which directly links to school and curriculum which is powerful in the secondary context.

School leaders broker and enable opportunities to proactively address equity within their school contexts and this is strengthened through collaborative efforts with such aspects as social worker employment.

Network Communities of Practice are being developed and whilst this has been viewed as done to, where principals have been able to form these collaborations there is successful outcomes with high trust. Growing teacher capability will be a potential outcome of effective networks.

The NZ context is diverse, has experienced a major review which has still to play out in any great shape or form and is very much based on a self managing and self governing model. Kahui Ako introduced in 2015 is a system changer and where these are well established, well led and are founded on strong values and principles, they have been able to demonstrate significant gains in teacher efficacy, capability and practices along with strengthening principal leadership. Positive impacts on student outcomes have also been noted due to the work of Kahui Ako.

The NZ context seems to have an appetite for collaboration whether in a Kahui Ako structure or some other cluster arrangement. NZ leaders in particular are very willing to share and in

many cases express their own vulnerability in their leadership. This style of leadership serves schools well as leaders seek to utilize the strengths and talents of those around them in productive and authentic ways.

Equity and excellence is a work in progress in NZ. We have pockets of practice where innovative and inclusive practices are evident. In the schools visited this was highly evident due to the passion and drive of the principals who lead professional conversations with their staffs and create programmes that enable students to express their culture and identity in meaningful and valued ways.

What stands out for me is the creativity and caring our NZ school leaders have for their students, staff and communities. As mentioned earlier in this report, number 8 wire thinking is alive and well within the NZ system and our principals have become well versed in innovation and system manipulation to best meet the needs of their schools, their students and their communities. It is this caring leadership and this creative entrepreneurial type of practice that leads school and student success. Yes, to a certain extent, we are chasing grades here in NZ, but we do have something very special that is growing in our schools that sets our students up in different ways for their own excellence and ultimately their own success. We just have to (and we must) make this happen for all.