

PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL

Term 3 2008

1. **Leadership** – and the quest for continuous improvement.
2. **Assessment** – related to raising student achievement
3. **Enjoyment** - Travel after 39 years in education.

By Christopher A. Magner
Ellerslie School, Auckland

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the NZEI, the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Principals Federation for creating and negotiating the sabbatical concept for Principals. Dave Stewart of Massey University during his "Reflective Principal" courses often talked about getting "out of the swamp to the higher ground" to enable the leader to reflect and plan ahead. The sabbatical has allowed me to do exactly that and travel to two conferences in England and France to place the qualities of leadership in a global forum.

The unanimous and generous support of the Ellerslie School Board of Trustees was greatly appreciated and right from the beginning of my proposal gave me the freedom to clear my mind and to focus on my goals.

I would like to acknowledge the Ellerslie School Staff as they continued to do what they do best and in many cases stepped into roles outside their normal jobs to allow me to have my sabbatical. To Jillian Mitchell the Acting Principal in my absence and the Ellerslie Team I thank you.

Proposal

"Effective leadership is a learned process over time that requires a certain type of leadership skill to initiate and maintain"

Jan M Robertson

University of Waikato 2004

Purpose Of Sabbatical

The Ellerslie School Mission Statement is: *To challenge our children to achieve personal standards of excellence in a balanced educational programme.*

Key strategic goals identified in the Ellerslie School Strategic plan include:

- To provide effective teaching, based on a sound knowledge of current learning theory and practice
- To provide stimulating and challenging programmes, taking account of any special learning needs or special abilities that are identified
- To use effective assessment methods to monitor student achievement and verify learning progress
- To commit to ongoing professional development

These goals are the driving force in planning a programme of leave in 2008. It is my desire to stay professionally up to date and to have time to reflect on my current and future practice that has led me to apply for sabbatical leave. In the school's recent Education Review Office report it is noted that:

The Principal's inclusive leadership style, focussed on the achievement of students, allows for a reflective culture between school leaders. School managers work collaboratively with each other and are future focused in their professional dialogue. ERO 2007

It is within this context that I feel I am in need of the opportunity to seek to extend and strengthen my own professional knowledge and leadership of Ellerslie School.

The purpose for the application for sabbatical is presented in three parts

1. Leadership.

A sabbatical will allow me to reflect upon my role as Principal of a large (U6) Auckland Full Primary School and to determine, as an educational leader, what challenges lie ahead educating children for the future and therefore what directions to take Ellerslie School as it moves into the future? To do this I seek to answer some key questions:

- Where will schools fit in tomorrow's society?
- What are they going to look like?
- What style of leadership will fit in tomorrow's world?
- Schools as organisations?
- What place do schools have in society?
- What impact are business, the economy and culture variety going to play?

I have had a range of leadership opportunities in my career culminating to my current principal's position. I subscribe to the world of continuous improvement for students, staff and of course myself. Changes in society, changes in government, changes in education are three factors that an educational leader has to deal with for the good of their learning community. What is the role of school improvement in an era of change? I want to be able to reflect on my educational and life experiences and be in an environment to share, listen and learn. I want Ellerslie School to embark on a direction that allows for the changes ahead without altering or compromising its goal of catering for raising student achievement.

To achieve my goals I would like to be in a forum that will provide insights into how I can improve my leadership in a changing world. New Zealand is no longer isolated from the rest of the world. World events and trends will affect Ellerslie School. There will be similarities and differences that I want to understand and reflect on as a leader.

2. Assessment

I have a responsibility to ensure that student achievement is raised in my school. A critical aspect of raising achievement relates to having robust formative assessment practices functioning in all classrooms. Assessment should directly impact on what classroom teachers and school leaders do to improve achievement. That is *assessment practices must be woven into the whole.*

I am passionate about teaching and the meaningful delivery of the curriculum so assessment has to be purposeful and understandable. To further strengthen my knowledge and leadership in assessment I feel it is critical to understand the world of assessment at an International level.

- What are the key purposes of assessment at classroom, school and community level?
- What are the key learning of other countries?
- What are the effective practices and/or mistakes from around the world?
- What are the international trends and perspectives in assessment?
- What are the alternative modes of assessment? And;
- What is best practice for Ellerslie School?

3. To enjoy myself and have a reflective break after 38 years in primary education.

I completed three years Teachers Training in 1971.. I took up my first principalship in 1988.

I would like my sabbatical to help improve my leadership, have a direct impact on the learning community of Ellerslie School and I would also like to have a bit of fun and enjoyment while doing so. I see the opportunity to take a sabbatical as an opportunity to recharge my enthusiasm and enjoyment of school leadership.

“One of the most crucial skills that a principal must have is the ability to be involved in reflective action. That is to say that she/he must be able to think critically about the events that have occurred, and are occurring, and be able to plan future action.”

David Stewart

I am grateful to be in a more “transparent” age where positions of responsibility are clear and the organisation does not circle continuously around the leader. I want to find out more about a new style of leadership and can I adapt overseas influences to Ellerslie School.

Background

It seems to me that the role of today’s leader/principal/manager is changing. Some of my colleagues embrace it and go to great lengths to study and model the change while others look to the past and work very hard to maintain an old style of leadership in a new kind of world.

Our leaders of the past (post WW2) developed an extremely workable, powerful hierarchical model that everybody understood and worked hard for especially the staff. Knowledge was power and given out by the leader in ‘bits’ and to ‘chosen’ workers. It worked for the times. The way I saw it in my ‘educational travels’ beginning in 1969 at Wellington Teachers College as a first year, was that when a leader left the organisation it took a long time to recover if at all. No one knew what some staff did. In fact it was a compliment to the leader when people discovered all the jobs they did and the question asked was “however were they going to be replaced?”.

I could not be that sort of leader.

Findings/Implications

To achieve my goals I chose to attend two international conferences.

1. Paris International Conference on Education, Economy and Society. (July)

This conference is intended to be a forum, discussion and networking place for academics, researchers, professionals, administrators, policy makers and industry representatives interested in education. All areas of education are invited, as well as economic, political, cultural and social themes relating to education.

2. Cambridge University: The 34th International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) Annual Conference. (September)

The conference theme was Reinterpreting Assessment Society Measurement and Meaning.

The conferences certainly delivered on providing a very wide range of topics at the workshops so I had to decide quickly the path to select or miss out. Unlike Australasian conferences and venues where room is not a problem many of the presentations/forums were in small rooms which were quickly filled. First in first served.

The sessions that had the most impact on me I shall list and explain the outcomes for me. Other sessions challenged me and I found them “scary” but fun however they were away from my topic of leadership (or maybe leadership should be scary but fun).

“Special and Inclusive Education” Dr Alice A Kozen, Niagara University , New York
Dr Kathleen Brown, Niagara University, New York.

What appealed to me was this was “an investigation of factors that positively or negatively influence collaborative relationships in inclusive classrooms”. The study examined teacher beliefs regarding benefits and problems associated with collaboration and what components are necessary to make collaboration successful.

After an academic and intense first day I found my self leaning towards once again the leadership and characteristics of teachers.

Dr Pamela Moreheal and Dr Robert Maxfield of Oakland University, Rochester presented an interesting paper on views and values – Understanding How Teachers View Aspects of Teacher Leadership. Their findings reveal a need for teachers to feel a part of “consequential” in their roles and work. Teachers surveyed felt they needed training to help learn to be leaders and their leadership efforts.

Like our students at Ellerslie, teachers too need the opportunities to grow and develop their leadership potential This study had an impact on me as I thought of the ways to lead this ‘back home’ – teacher meetings, reports, more quality learning circles with themes, professional development reports. I also believe that the opportunity for regular team meetings allow for greater input. Minutes from these meetings to be shared electronically.

Relating this back to Ellerslie School was the important part and I found myself realising that if successful collaboration is your aim then you as a leader have to be part of the cycle. You have to share your thoughts, your mistakes, your beliefs. In other words to get a little you have to give a little yourself. We have to accept that we may not be the expert in all educational fields and delegate the interested parties on the team to explore further. Reporting back in a collaborative environment is the follow up.

“Educational Leadership – Communication Education for Managers Managing Knowledge”

Ms Celina Pascoe – University of Canberra

Prof Elizabeth More – Macquarie University

This paper shared the 3 year research on Knowledge Management and organisational communication. The findings from this session outlined to me that we need to continue to learn and discuss organisational communication which is vital for managers of knowledge processes.

Values Education and the increasing importance of this area was evident at this conference with a lecture from Dr Thomas W Nielsen, University of Canberra, Australia. He suggested that values education and the whole notion of human goodness is not an “add on” to our curriculum but a view to everything like glasses – a curriculum lens.

Values education is evident at Ellerslie and will require monitoring at a management level. I like the idea that it can function as a “social glue” and a pivotal point for quality teaching and learning. The term “global citizenship” was used and is becoming more important dare I say than “global corporates” I am inspired to link values education with our all important new area of enviro science. I believe that we as educators must develop these areas for our future and help students think about the issues and solutions ahead.

“The Brain is a map of Africa 200 years ago – spots unresearched”

Dr Thomas W Nielsen

Note: The increased management units negotiated by the NZEI will help give status and recognition for such areas as Ellerslie School.

I must congratulate Dr Jennie Billot, A.U.T., New Zealand who delivered a high quality session on “Educational Leadership – Meeting School Diversity with Leadership of Difference”

New Zealand Schools and our educational system stands proud and tall by comparison to many around the world and Dr Jennie Billot outlined this to a diverse group of attendees including myself = the genuine article. This session re-affirmed many beliefs I have about being an individual in a collaborative world, encouraging diversity, celebrating differences and providing leadership that seeks to be responsive to the modern community that Auckland has become. More worldwide research is coming out about this topic of leadership within multi-cultural populations and I thank my fellow kiwi for bringing NZ findings to the attention of this conference.

Other sessions were attended but I was focussed firmly on my role at Eilerslie School and the excitement of being a leader of a multicultural school. I have opportunities to get formats in place and use common practises throughout. I reflected on our successful music specialist crossing all ages and cultures. Every child receiving tuition every week from a specialist has allowed for our 3 orchestras, 2 choirs and a band – as well as celebrating differences. The vehicle of music unites!

The final day had 2 completely different yet thought provoking sessions.

1. Professor Georgina Tsolidis from the University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia.

“Youthful Imagination – Schooling, Subcultures and Social Justice”

School as it is today with sub-cultures of the young – frightening yet real. State schools versus private all ending up as adult citizens of Australia.

I felt inspired by what is happening in this area and although different to me and my world in many parts we ignore the problems and the real lives of our youth at our peril. I would like to hear and find out more in this area.

2. The Jetsons (cartoon 1962)
Wow!

We watched this cartoon with astonishing thoughts about its accuracy of looking into the future bought closer with George Jetson at home from work with R.S.I. syndrome from pressing computer buttons. Dr Thomas Schalow, Professor, at the University of Marketing and Distribution Sciences suggesting that future prediction today is even more difficult. It is however a part of our job as Principals to do so and lead the learning for our students.

Conference number 2 at Cambridge University was a similar format in that there was a wide range of sessions in small rooms so a plan had to be developed as well as plan B as many sessions were quickly filled. I planned a theme around School-based Assessment and drifted again to the notion of citizenship and how do we assess that!

The opening address by Tim Oates (Director of Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment) related a true story of a 1910 letter about a possible mistake in an exam marking from a leading businessman. “The detection of a mistake would bring considerable joy to our household. The tickets of a trip for 2 to Paris is not a bribe merely perhaps an incentive to investigate. Our daughter is extremely upset about her marks etc etc etc”.

However bad an examination system it is better than a system of nepotism that endured in many societies/countries.

Gordan Stobart talked about the validity of an ability test. Be careful what you can claim from them. A good maths test is not relevant for 1st year art students.

No speaking or listening in U.K. National English tests.

There is no doubt the increasing science and study of assessment around the world and also its commercial potential. I met many likeable people who I thought were colleagues only to discover they were sales persons working for big assessment corporates designing tests in U.S.A. and Europe. Big business!

I attended workshops from around the world with sophisticated assessment practises and tools.

School-based Assessment in Hong Kong: Policies, Issues and Practice – Dr Rita Berry
School Use of External and Internal Assessment Data to Improve Student Performance – Professors John Elkins, Joy Cumming, Claire Wyatt-Smith.

Griffith University Brisbane Australia .

A European Survey on Language Competencies – Neil Jones, Cambridge, ESOL.

Assessment for Improving Learning in Schools in India – Dr Kirti Kapur

‘Setting Standards’ – Graham S. Maxwell - Educational Consultant UK

Developing Curriculum Standards – Dr David Phillips, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

“Soft Skills – Hard to Assess?”- Barbara Hill.

“Testing Citizens- What do pupils and teachers think about assessments of citizenship?”

- Mary Richardson

Conclusions

As a Principal of a New Zealand school it was a privilege to attend these 2 international conferences and realise that we truly do live in a “global village”. I realised the importance of languages in the new Europe (the world in fact including New Zealand) and how do we assess this? The importance of celebrating the richness of diversity. These are the challenges facing today’s schools in the global landscape. Isolation is not the key but the opportunity to know one’s own culture and have the confidence to learn and step outwards. This applies to students, staff and leaders.

As a leader it was obvious in all my travels that relationships are the critical aspect of any organisation and being a positive role model in our own learning institution of Ellerslie School. The distribution of leadership, shared responsibilities, common beliefs and understandings are all part of the characteristics and conditions needed for effective leadership. Successful leaders are trusted and surround themselves with quality staff. The purpose of their learning environment is easily articulated and uncomplicated

Assessment practices and technology are tools to help in this quest to produce thinkers to cope with an ever-changing world. Storage and display of data becoming increasingly important for a variety of audiences. It has been clearly re-affirmed for me that at Ellerslie School our assessment of student achievement should and does confirm a variety of internal and external formats which includes both formative and summative assessment. The opportunities for self-review need to be present. Review is ongoing as revised and new formats are regularly introduced to help assessment at all levels – teachers daily assessment practices to principal reporting of school wide data, trends and patterns. All tests can be vulnerable to challenge from disgruntled individuals but continuous student achievement is central to our learning organisation. There is no quick fix and we should be suspicious if there were claims of one. I like a variety of assessment practices to cope with a variety of learners. The same way as I like a variety of staff to be a part of the Ellerslie learning community.

Being flexible, open to new concepts, continuous improvement without forgetting successful practices of the past starts with the Principal. As I left the UK at the end of my sabbatical it was reported in the newspapers that many schools, countries, failed to get the national test results published (computer problems) in time for parents to make their judgements of successful schools. Letters to the editor flourished. No-one suggested that parents might have to visit a school, get a sense of the atmosphere and ask meaningful questions about whether the school was suitable or not.

Back to New Zealand where all is well after a 3 month sabbatical. I achieved Goal number 3 by enjoying myself visiting family, friends throughout UK, France and Italy finishing with surfing in Biarritz, France and relaxing in Cinque Terre, Northern Italy.

References

- IAEA 2008 International Association for Educational Assessment Programme – September 2008.
- International Conference on Education, Economy and Society Programme – July 2008.
- The Reflective Principal – School Development within a Learning Community – David Stewart and Tom Prebble.
- Prophet of a New Order – Charles Handy