Principal's Sabbatical Report

Term 2 and Term 3 2014.

Chris Nielsen, Whakatane High School.

Purpose:

- To investigate innovative curriculum models that are student focussed and provide an authentic context for learners.
- To research models of good practice in terms of integrating programmes of learning between secondary schools and tertiary providers.
- To consider a range of strategies to lead innovation and change in school.

This report will be based on two key areas; Vocational Pathways and integrated learning and developing a Digital Strategy.

Part One

Vocational Pathways and Integrated Learning:

With the demand for NCEA Level 2 to be the minimum qualification for school leavers many schools, including Whakatane High School, are providing an increasing range of course options. Many of these are vocationally based and often are delivered in conjunction with tertiary organisations. There are significant challenges in providing an integrated programme of learning that maximises the areas of interest of individual students involved. I visited a number of schools in New Zealand and overseas and looked at how this issue was being addressed. I wish to acknowledge the Principals and staff of these schools for their willingness to share both their time and willingness to share their experiences.

Whakatane High School is a member of the Eastern Bay of Plenty Trades Academy. Students are motivated by these courses and good results are being achieved. However it has become evident that not all students see a link between their course at Trades Academy and their school based programme. One focus of this report is to investigate how a more integrated programme of learning can be developed.

There is considerable evidence supporting the effectiveness of classroom programmes that appeal to a student's interests and experience. Vivianne Robinson, in her book 'Student-Centred Leadership' states that

“Students are more motivated to learn if the lesson connects with their experience and interests. The connection makes the teacher more attractive and the material more comprehensible and relevant.”

Similarly the Education Review Office National Report ‘Evaluation at a Glance: Priority Learners in New Zealand Schools (August 2012) identified three key interrelated issues that need to be addressed to significantly lift the achievement of students, particularly for priority learners. They were:

Issue One: Shifting the focus to student-centred learning.

Issue Two: Knowledgably implementing a responsive and rich curriculum.

Issue Three: Using assessment information to know about, and plan for, students learning.

These well supported findings suggest that there are considerable gains to be made by building on the interest and learning of students in Trades Academy courses by developing classroom based courses that acknowledge this interest and experience. The opportunity to offer classroom programmes, particularly in mathematics, science and English, have real potential to raise student achievement.

In addition, the impact of communication technology on the provision of individualised and integrated learning programmes was considered. Discussions with individual schools and attendance at the 2014 Edutech Conference in Brisbane provided the basis for this.

Activities:

The following school visits were undertaken:

- Singapore Overseas Family School
- Theodore Fontaine School, Berlin
- London Academy School, London
- Hauraki Plains College
- Massey High School
- Hobsonville Point School
- Waiopehu College
- Taradale High School
- The Studio Schools Trust, Manchester

School visits:

Integrated Learning.

Most of the schools visited, had developed vocational based courses for some senior students. These were often as part of a trade's academy and were delivered in conjunction with a tertiary provider. The mode of delivery was varied. In many cases students attended these courses off site for one or two days per week.

Where the school had the fund holding responsibility for trades academy programmes, some courses were offered on the school site. In these cases schools had often undertaken an expensive and time consuming accreditation process to enable delivery of the qualification on site. Other courses were delivered at school under the accreditation of a tertiary provider. Assessments from these courses was carried out by school staff and moderated by the tertiary organisation.

One school delivered a construction course that mirrored the working day. Students were involved in building a house on the school site and attended from 7.30 am to 4.00 pm. On completion, the house is sold. This very successful programme required significant outlay both in the provision of equipment and the employment of a qualified tutor.

In nearly all cases, schools reported little use of the student's trade's academy course experiences, in providing contextual learning opportunities. There were few examples of students having their school classroom learning based on the activities they were involved in at trade's academy. The exception would be the construction course mentioned above. Having the same group of students together on site, doing the same activities allowed for subject work in mathematics and english to be contextualised.

All schools stated a desire to make better use of these opportunities to develop real learning. The difficulties in achieving this included coordinating the programmes of trades academy courses and school subjects, and a lack of time for communication.

Progress towards addressing this issue is being made through the adaptation of Vocational Pathways.

"The Vocational Pathways are a new tool that provides a clear framework for vocational options, support better programme design and careers advice, and improve the links between education and employers." (Vocational Pathways, Ministry of Education)

This document identifies 6 Pathways.

- Primary Industries
- Services Industries
- Social and Community Services

- Manufacturing and Technology
- Construction and Infrastructure
- Creative Industries.

Schools are mapping their curriculum to the vocational pathways. This process aligns individual achievement standards to one or more of the pathways. This in turn will allow students to plan a course of study to gain recognition in particular pathways.

In most trades academies there are a range of course options. Because relatively few students from a particular school are doing a particular course, it is difficult to align the school based study with the trade's academy course. Often a school based class will draw students from a number of trade's academy courses. By adopting the vocational pathways approach, it will be possible to narrow the range of standards students need to achieve. This provides a first step in gaining relevance between the on and off site components of a student's programme.

Studio Schools

The English Studio Schools model does provide a solution. The following description is taken from the Studio Schools Trust website www.studioschoolstrust.org

What is a Studio School?

The Studio School is a new concept in education, which seeks to address the growing gap between the skills, and knowledge that young people require to succeed, and those that the current education system provides. Studio Schools pioneer a bold new approach to learning which includes teaching through enterprise projects and real work. This approach ensures students' learning in is rooted in the real world and helps them to develop the skills they need to flourish in life. For detailed information, please read the Studio Schools Brochure.

Studio Schools are designed for 14-19 year olds of all abilities. They are small schools for 300 students; and with year-round opening and a 9-5 working day, they feel more like a workplace than a school. Working closely with local employers, Studio Schools will offer a range of academic and vocational qualifications including GCSEs in English, Maths and Science, as well as paid work placements linked directly to employment opportunities in the local area. Students will gain a broad range of employability and life skills through the **CREATE skills framework**, and will have the option to go on to university, further training, and into employment.

Essential Elements of a Studio School

At the heart of the Studio Schools' model are seven key features, which have been developed through extensive research and consultation with employers, education experts and young people. These essential elements provide a framework for all Studio Schools and will be built upon by individual schools who will tailor the model to meet the needs of their local community and local labour market.

Academic Excellence

Like traditional schools, Studio Schools will teach the National Curriculum and offer key academic and vocational qualifications. The qualifications offered by individual schools will vary depending on local circumstances; however all will deliver qualifications at Level 2 and above, including core GCSEs in English, Maths and Science. On leaving their Studio School, students will have the full range of progression routes available to them. They will have gained the qualifications, knowledge and skills to choose the option which is suitable to them: entering the jobs market from an advantageous position; starting an apprenticeship; or going on to further or higher education.

Employability and Enterprise Skills

Key employability and life skills will underpin all the activities at a Studio School through the unique **CREATE skills framework**. CREATE is comprised of a wide range of skills and stands for Communication, Relating to people, Enterprise, Applied skills, Thinking skills and Emotional intelligence. Four years in the making, CREATE is grounded in a wide range of skills typologies and has been developed specifically for Studio Schools in order to equip young people with the key skills that they need to flourish.

Personalised Curriculum

In Studio Schools all students will be assigned a ‘personal coach’ who will meet with them one-to-one every fortnight to develop their own personalised learning plan. This will allow students to tailor their curriculum to their individual needs and aspirations, and track their progress towards their CREATE skills and qualifications. Personalisation of the curriculum will be further supported through a small school environment in which every young person will be able to access the tailored support that they need.

Practical Learning

Enquiry-based learning (EBL) lies at the heart of the Studio Schools' curriculum model. In Studio Schools, students will learn the National Curriculum principally through Enterprise Projects in their school, local businesses and surrounding community. To root students’ learning in the real world most projects will involve external commissions. So whether it is a health report for their local hospital or a business brief for a local employer, students’ learning will be authentic and will actively involve them in local community life.

Real Work

Students in Year 10 and 11 will participate in work experience each week - this varies from half a day per week to a day each week depending on the Studio School, and the requirements of their industry partners. In Year 12 and 13, it is the SST recommendation that students spend two days per week in work. There is considerable evidence that this direct, 'hands on' experience better prepares young people for life and work.

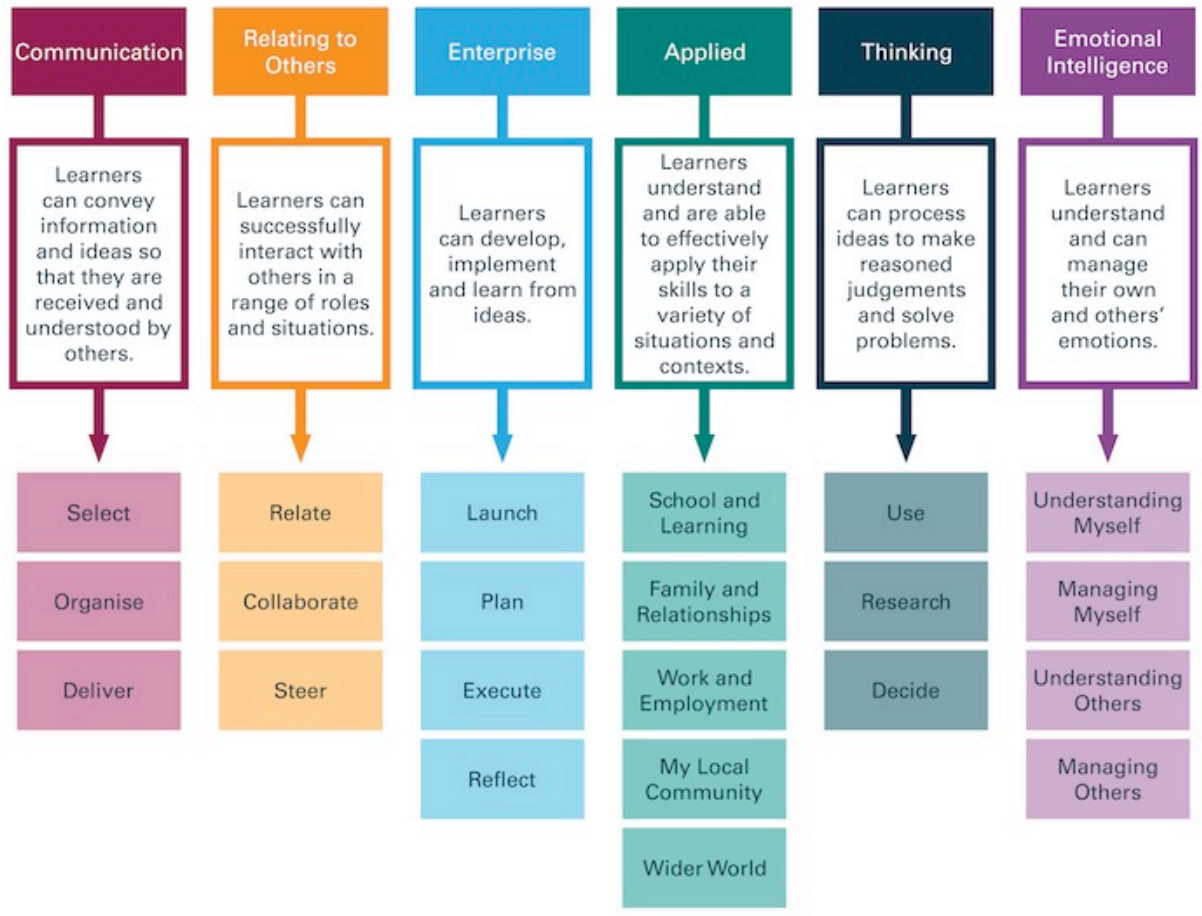
Small Schools

As small schools of around 300 students, Studio Schools offer a supportive, personalised learning environment in which strong pastoral care runs throughout the school's activities. This helps to ensure that no young person gets lost within the institution and that young people are able to build strong relationships with their peers and coaches. Crucially, coaches know students well, making them better able to tailor the curriculum to their individual needs and aspirations.

Students of All Abilities

Studio Schools are fully inclusive and comply with the national School Admissions Code.

CREATE Framework



Studio Schools work closely with local employers to establish enterprise projects in their school, local business and community. All students undertake work relevant work experience which is ideally paid. Examples are available on the website. The curriculum is 50% to 60% project based with the remainder delivered in a traditional manner.

A key focus of the Studio Schools Trust is to re-establish vocational activities as valuable for all. The belief that practically all employment is of an applied nature underpins this stance. While, for example, engineering and medicine have a large amount of academic study in training, they are applied in the workplace.

There is much in this model that could be adapted to the New Zealand context. The CREATE Framework aligns very easily to the Key Competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum.

Part Two

Developing a Digital Strategy

School visits.

The direction and development of a digital strategy was discussed with all schools visited. It was interesting to note that New Zealand schools were in a similar position to those overseas. The common themes in schools were:

- Schools had or were about to get Ultra-Fast Broadband (UFB) connection.
- Students were welcome to bring their own device and to log on via the school network for free.
- Most NZ schools had moved away from specifying a particular device. (85% of NZ schools according to MOE circular)
- Most schools were encouraging the purchase of laptops and netbooks rather than tablets as these offered more versatility for learning.
- Most NZ schools were focusing on the cloud based platform they would use – either Google Docs or Microsoft Office 365.

The issues schools faced were:

- Equity for all students in the access to digital devices.
- Providing professional development for teachers so that this technology would enhance learning opportunities for students. This was required for developing teachers' skills in using digital technologies and in applying these in the classroom setting.
- The cost maintenance, support and infrastructure.

EDUTECH Conference – 2 to 4 June 2014 – Brisbane Events Centre.

EDUTECH is the southern hemispheres largest educational congress. Over 5000 attended, with representatives from primary, secondary, tertiary, libraries, government and suppliers.

The key message from this conference was that modern communication technology has the capacity to transform education. Schools, education and teachers have to make a huge shift to capture this potential. John Galvin of Intel presented a simple outline of this evolution:

Transforming Education.

1. Monolithic classroom **–**Teacher led with students as consumers.
2. Computer based – devices, connectivity, and digital content. May have own devices but still in rows with teacher led learning. Technology used largely for data gathering. Transitional Teacher led – teacher lectures, technology allows some student collaboration.
3. Student Centric Model – 21st Century Learning
    - Communication
    - Critical Thinking
    - Creativity
    - Collaboration
    - Digital Literacy

Challenge to not only introduce technology but to transform education through its use.

All presenters maintained the significance of the teacher. While the role may change, the teacher remains a key component of learning.

This conference featured an impressive range of world class presenters. The highlights for me were:

Sir Ken Robinson (sirkenrobinson.com)

Sir Ken's stated mission is "to transform the culture of education and organisations with a richer conception of human creativity and intelligence." His amusing presentation followed this theme. I would recommend viewing Sir Ken Robinson on www.ted.com

Professor Sugata Mitra

Professor Mitra presented his 'Hole in the Wall' findings and how this work had led to the development of Self Organised Learning Environments (SOLE). SOLE has students working collaboratively answering big open questions with no correct

answers. Students determine their own direction as they address the question. Interestingly, Professor Mitra proposed that a small group of students sharing one computer is more beneficial than all students having their own device. He maintains that there is greater collaboration and sharing of ideas with this approach. Again I recommend his presentations on www.ted.com

Ewen McIntosh (notosh.com)

Ewen McIntosh gave a presentation about agile leadership. He stated that a five year plan is antithesis of agile leadership. He encouraged schools to do one thing really well to impact student learning. He presented research that showed that grading adds nothing for learning. He felt that students needed to feel free to make mistakes as part of learning and not be fearful of the resulting grade. In this light he spoke of FAIL – First Attempt At Learning. Students need to be in 'the trough of enlightenment' as they come to grips with new concepts and content.

Dan Haesler (danhaesler.com)

Dan Haesler presented: 'Using technology to enhance student engagement.' Key points from this presentation were:

- Boring stuff on I pad is still boring stuff.
- 50% of year 12 Australian kids disengaged – that is those still at school!
- We confuse conformity & compliance with engagement
- How many students genuinely absorbed in what they are doing.
- Would kids turn up if they didn't have to?
- Most kids going OK – how do we improve their situation.
- Forget engaging students in class – rather engage them in life and the community.
- Respect, Trust and Care – foundations of student-teacher relationship.

Conclusion.

In the area of vocational pathways and integrated learning, there are clearly some ways forward. The mapping of the vocational pathways to a school's curriculum provides options. There exists an opportunity to make significant progress in capitalising on students interest and experience in practical

learning programmes in more formal classroom situations. The Studio School model provides another option in this regard.

Digital technology will impact on all areas of education. The trend now is for schools to focus on the cloud based platform they will use to enhance collaborative learning rather than determining a particular device. This is a significant step forward. Students access the digital world via a range of devices in their day to day life. It seems sensible that this range of devices should then be accepted in schools. The biggest challenge is to support teachers to develop the skills needed to provide engaging programmes that taps into the potential of digital technology.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the willingness of the principals and staff at the schools I visited to share their experiences and initiatives. The open manner of this sharing was really appreciated. I would also acknowledge the Whakatane High School Board of Trustees for making this sabbatical opportunity available. Thank you also to deputy principals Carole Hughes and Lauren Crowe who managed the school so ably in my absence.

Reference List.

Robinson, V., (2011). *Student-Centred Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

E.R.O. (2012). *Evaluation at a Glance: Priority Learners in New Zealand Schools.* Wellington: Education Review Office. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz

Ministry of Education 2014. *Vocational Pathways*

Websites:

www.studioschools.ore

www.sirkenrobinson.com

www.ted.com

www.notosh.com

www.danhaesler.com

Implications for Whakatane High School.

As a result of this report, I would recommend the following actions for future strategic planning:

- Map school curriculum to vocational pathways.
- Continue to develop a vocational pathways stream in years 11, 12 and 13.
- Coordinate/align Trades Academy courses with school based subjects, especially English, mathematics and science.
- Develop a 5 year digital strategy with first steps being to analyse surveys and establish initial actions for 2015.
- Ensure appropriate professional development is available to support the use of digital technology to improve teaching and learning.
- Establish and trial academic mentoring and goal setting as an alternative to parent report evenings.