

# Sabbatical report 2007

## *What changes can secondary schools make to meet the demands for personalised learning?*

**Prue Kelly**

Principal Wellington High School - Sabbatical Term 2 2007

### **Acknowledgements:**

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### **Executive Summary:**

Most current education policy advocates a system that places the learner at the centre with personalised learning. New approaches are demanded against a background of screams for national examinations that will permit comparisons of institutions, at the expense of the learners.

Some schools are quietly getting on with personalisation, with programmes such as AToL that permit shared objectives and co construction of learning

There are programmes that can be introduced into the rigid structure of current secondary practice that can create powerful learners with personalised programmes without adding to teacher work load. In fact creating active learners who know what to do when they don't know what to do reduces stress and workload for teachers.

Versions of Personal Learning Objectives (PLO) currently being introduced at Wellington High are working effectively overseas and are helping to engage student and families.

The Building Powerful Learners programme is an effective way of placing students at the centre of the learning process and personalising their learning. It is being effectively implemented in some secondary schools in England and would fit well with the ethos at High, provided that proper time was given to training of staff.



## **The purpose of the investigation evolved during the planning of the sabbatical and was refined to include:**

An investigation into how to begin creating personalised learning environments within inclusive classrooms – specifically:

- How can building powerful learners contribute to personalising learning environments?
- How can mentoring and changed reporting to parents contribute to personalising learning environments?
- Do these innovations mean more work for secondary teachers?

## **Rationale and Background:**

As the efficiency of the second modern education paradigm<sup>1</sup> moves into a period of rapid acceleration with information available to anyone who can google - knowing is no longer enough, nor is the regurgitation of others' knowledge. Understanding, synthesising, processing and sifting have become essential skills. Many students have responded to this change much more quickly than schools, and this is reflected in attendance, achievement, selective NCEA sitting, under engagement and suspension, all of which are signalling that overdue system-wide change is due.

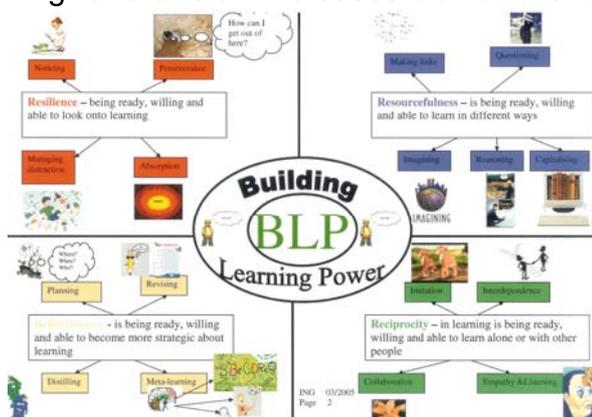
Also signalling the need for significant system-wide change that goes beyond tinkering with NCEA are:

- The Secondary Futures group<sup>2</sup> and their Student First finding reinforce this. **Students First** looks at student-centred learning and what it might mean for the delivery and organising of secondary education in the future. It moves away from one lesson suits all and places the goals, aspirations and context of each learner at the centre of delivery; students' dreams and talents lead to their learning goals. Students First builds around their future and expects that they will succeed.  
They see four probable pathways if students are at the centre of their learning and they are to develop the capacities. **Customised pathways** – student and teacher work together to co-construct a personalised learning programme where teachers' experience and knowledge combines with students' goals and aspirations to create pathways for achievement. A bit like current IEPs but for everyone. Individualised (personalised) learning will mean; loyalty to the learner not the institution, learning how to learn not the transfer of information.
- The current Minister of Education sees the personalisation of learning as the answer. He says students have to be informed active participants in their own learning, that they should contribute to decisions about what learning works best for them and understand how they are progressing<sup>3</sup>. Strategies to permit personalisation, effective teaching, assessment for learning to lift literacy and numeracy and revision of the curriculum so that it can be tailored to meet student needs are all vital steps.
- The new competency-focused draft curriculum<sup>4</sup> prepares the individual for active participation in the economy and in society by producing confident,

connected, actively involved life-long learners. This means active seekers, users and **creators** of knowledge, not passive receivers, - able to think, participate and contribute, manage self, relate to others and to communicate starts the journey. The curriculum document sees ICT, e-learning, as having the potential to transform classrooms in the same way it has transformed the world. The **Enabling the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner**, an action plan for e-learning 2006 – 2010, reinforces the notion of placing the learner at the centre of the education system and transforming the way we learn.

In November 2006 NZCER invited Guy Claxton to New Zealand to talk about Building Powerful Learners<sup>5</sup> (BLP).

Claxton argues that the emphasis on knowing tons of stuff increases **demand** and **stress** on students. Stressed kids are demotivated students. So the issue is how to increase each student's resource without increasing demand. To do this we need to ask students to reflect on how they learn and how they can be better learners not just try to make them learn better. He calls this stretching students' learning muscles. If we create powerful learners able to think about their learning our classrooms will not have passive passengers but rather creative active crew ready to question and learn. Students can report on their own learning habits to their learning manager by producing evidence of what and how they have learned.



By building learning practice we can develop a disposition towards curiosity. Questioning becomes more and more complex resulting in learning journeys –that are self driven and personally interesting. Dispositions that equip them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

At the beginning of 2007 Wellington High School began a different style of reporting to Year 9 caregivers in which the roopu (form) teacher gathers information from core teachers, discusses with the students and caregivers and sets learning goals for the year – Personal Learning Objectives (PLOs). It is to complement the current learning skills (learning behaviour) certificate that juniors work to achieve by the end of Yr 10. Currently the plan is for termly 15 minutes meeting to review and set goals. The longer term goal is to have school wide PLO interview days in 2009.

The philosophy behind the change was to provide personalised pathways and empower students and caregivers to understand their own learning needs.

Some UK secondary schools have been using this style of reporting for up to five years.

## Investigation:

The writer visited schools in the United Kingdom to see how two innovations; changed reporting and building powerful learners, are being implemented and what relevance they had for changes happening and those contemplated at Wellington High.

## Findings:

### Newtown High:

Newtown had their first school wide Academic Review Days (students study at home except for the time they come to school to talk).

All form teachers are academic mentors and a comprehensive set of manuals back the process<sup>6</sup>. The learning goals included both behavioural and academic goals.

Keystone 3 and Keystone 4 Goals based on the previous keystone achievement are set at the beginning of each of the two years each take to achieve. Subject teachers set the goals. Mentors meet students six times during the year including one on review day with parents and form time every morning.

Although the school is only half way through the first year staff spoke to endorsed the focus on individual skills and progress, especially for the gifted and talented and the special needs students

Three student spoken to said they were a bit worried about their parents knowing so much about their learning but had found it good to be able to say 'I am on track' or 'yes I have talked with my mentor about that and know what I have to do.'

### South Dartmoor Community College

South Dartmoor was entering its fifth year of using data to track

Dartmoor is on a journey - Having their 5<sup>th</sup> year of personalised parent report meetings<sup>7</sup>

They spent some time sorting new terminology and meanings and all agreed to use it – as a simplification of past systems.

There are data review days to make sure that data tells the story of the student.

Each department had decided: *What makes a great historian? geographer? scientist? etc*

Agreed terminology:

**Key Stage indicator** comes from last key stage grade – external data-

**Projected Grade:** guess at what the student will achieve after two years at SD –done by senior management from student's history.

**Response Grade:** departments decide this.

**Home Learning:** departments decide this.

At KS3 there are band levels 5-6 grades are refined in the second year of KS as part of review.

Progress grades are

T+ exceed target

T on target

T- under target



South Dartmoor is also using **BLP** working with local contributing schools to teach students before they reach secondary school. They come into KS3 knowing the language of learning and the 4Rs. Home work is called **Home Learning - changed attitude of staff and parents and kids to homework**. No learning, no home activities.

The challenge they see now is to integrate academic with pastoral get the two systems meshed. The pastoral team is using data to track students – *still provides pastoral care but not just muddly cuddly*. Most important data is the student's story across the curriculum. Head of House have vertical groupings - 250 students - 10 tutors who stay with the students. Assemblies run by HH with input from P – provides time for tutors to see small groups or individuals.

John - Art teacher – advanced skills teacher - language of learning gives students a voice.

Need to incorporate BLP words into the culture of teaching and learning.

Every one is on a learning journey - *I don't laminate anything as everything is moving, nothing ever at a finished state*.

### **Brislington Enterprise College**

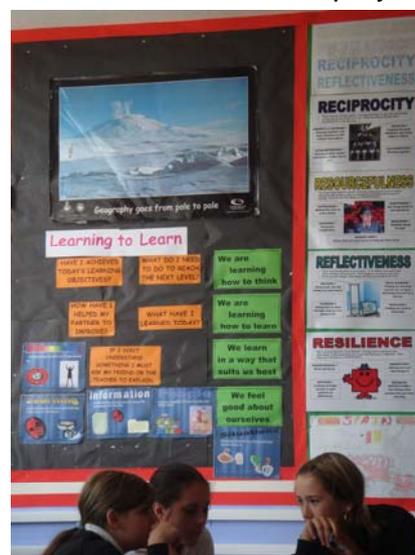
BEC is reinventing itself with new funding, enlarged sixth form opportunities and next year will move into a whole newly built school. It is multi-cultural in a relatively poor area of Bristol and one of schools TLO recommended.

BLP – has been in the school for about two years - all staff have had PD and the language and skills are compulsory in lesson plans which HoDs check - wall display of 4Rs are prominent. All families receive information at the beginning of the year explaining the 4 Rs and the policies around learning and curriculum.

In addition using the RSA Opening Minds curriculum framework and hand books<sup>8</sup> they have introduce project based integrated studies in Keystage 3.

Humanities began and now it is across the school – moving to competency based curriculum in Yrs 7 and 8. Timetabled projects (4 hours a week) for Yr 7 cross curriculum which are taken by form teachers and are framed using BLP and the opening minds process to determine competencies. *Needs teachers willing to experiment and take a risk and not all teachers are or do*.

I observed a humanities teacher led project which certainly used the language of learning and the students were actively engaged, connecting their learning to past learning, noticing and planning new learning and students could talk about their learning. Students maintained a project log book in which they self assessed their competencies and their learning skills. A small group of girls described their learning and how they are resourceful, resilient, reflective and could work with others. Summed up by one student's statement: *'I know what to do when I don't know what to do'*.



## Park High School

In north west of London, Park High is an oversubscribed multicultural school where most of the 1150 students have English as their second language. Their A\*-C achievement is high but contextualised valued added is much lower. They are working to change this.

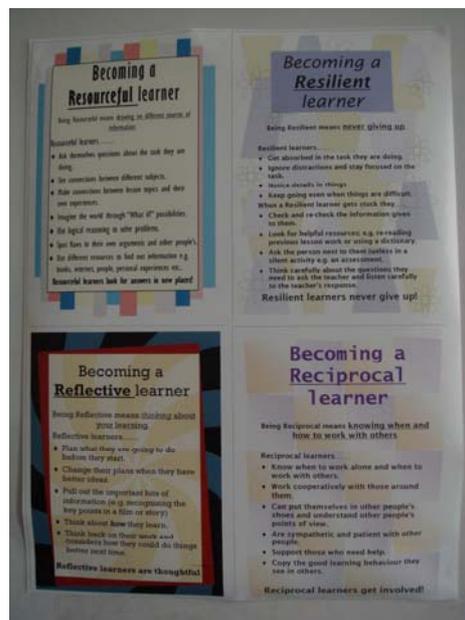
The clear concise strategic plan which includes building powerful learners and student personal development – life long learning and well being.

The school strategy includes development common languages for learning, teaching, leadership and relationships through (doing with): building powerful learners, assessment for learning, literacy across the curriculum and coaching and (doing to) student progress checks, formal lesson observations, departmental reviews, performance management, accountability and quality feedback. The HoF has 1-1 meetings with staff three times a year to explain student progress and this is reported accurately to the Principal. Principal believes Claxton is right but you can't move fast. The first challenge is to work with teachers in the way you want to work with students and the Principal must be actively participating/leading with the teachers held accountable. A classroom teacher who wants to act as champion/driver and can share and coach is essential.

Coach Bob – music teacher – started with himself then with a group of staff and their own learning with the goal of spreading the language and philosophy into school culture – they still have a way to go. Each department has a position as learning leader. PD is held Tuesday mornings

before school to embed BLP as the model for learning and enable teachers to reach a deeper level of learning. They use the Open Mind material and the tracking learning online (TLO) and the eBLP activity book on CD (TLO). BLP learning skills are in the student diaries and posters displayed. Observations of teachers concentrate on learning rather than teaching particularly for teacher who need doing to because they are not really with the change.

Bob considers the BLP initiative has done more to reduce his workload than any other action – *students are active learners not passive receivers who wait for him to tell them how to do things.*



## Twyford Grammar

Twyford is in year 4 of a 6 year programme<sup>9</sup> to revitalise the school learning programme and not be *an exam factory where stressed out teachers do all the work spoon feeding a revision guide obsessed set of customers* but to develop independent motivated learners.

A carefully thought out strategy saw them identify their pathway, build in-school interest and capability, engage TLO, develop a core group with departmental BLP champions, redefine HoD job descriptions to include BLP, refocus observation

criteria for use in triads to encourage BLP, develop a common language of learning, HoYs incorporate ideas and language into assemblies, ongoing PD, parent information evenings, liaise with other schools on the journey and finally take ownership of BLP by making the programme name L2P Learning to Perform, which seemed to fit better with the schools status as a specialist music college.

### Implications:

- Setting personalised learning objectives is the pathway Wellington High should continue. However it can be refined. Building on what has been done this year there are aspects that we can improve; annual caregiver meetings may be adequate, it may be necessary to combine the Certificate in Learning skills and the PLOs, Yr 9 annual curriculum goals that evolve into Yr 10 may reduce confusion.
- BLP can be introduced into secondary settings successfully with careful planning, champions and mentoring – there is plenty of supporting material available but it may need to be tailored to a New Zealand style
- British staff who have trained and embraced this way of building student learning ability have made second order change and really changed their practice. It may be difficult to achieve this level of adoption without training by experts like TLO.
- A common language of learning can strengthen the learning culture in a school
- Creating active learners can reduce stress on staff and students
- BLP seems to fit well with work being done, by High, to personalise learning through AToL, PLOs and the numeracy project. The challenge is to get staff not just to see it as another change they have to make
- To really benefit from such a programme schools may need to be able to use resources more flexibly and change some of the apparent rigidity in current timetables and school days - one hour even two hour periods and 8 or 9 teachers a week especially for juniors may not be good enough.



## References:

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- <sup>1</sup> In 1999 Robert Branson from Florida State University wrote a paper entitled "The Upper Limit Hypothesis" <http://www.cpt.fsu.edu/pdf/teaching.pdf> . In this hypothesis Branson portrayed schools as a technology that consisted of a collection of products, systems and environments that met particular needs and opportunities of the community and over time schools increasingly became more efficient until they approached an upper limit of 100 percent. Branson proposed that education had approached its upper limit of efficiency in the early 1960s!
- <sup>2</sup> Students First
- <sup>3</sup> Education Today Issue 2 2007 page 9 From the Government
- <sup>4</sup> Curriculum
- <sup>5</sup> Guy Claxton 2002 Building learning Power TLO Ltd
- <sup>6</sup> Newtown High Manuals include: The Role of Learning Mentor  
Guidance for Pupil Mentoring 2007/8  
An Introduction to Learning Styles  
Key Stage 3 Learning Skills  
Key Stage 4 Academic Mentoring Record  
Key Stage 4 Learning Skills  
Key Stage 4 Academic Mentoring Record
- <sup>7</sup> Hannah Frankel 2007 A private Function TES This Week 9 March 2007
- <sup>8</sup> Information from BEC includes: RSA Opening Minds Project Handbook  
Opening Minds: implementing a competence- based curriculum  
Opening Minds Curriculum network  
Opening Minds: planning to ensure the development of competencies in units  
My Project Log Book  
BEC student competency record
- <sup>9</sup> Information from Twyford Grammar includes:  
School Improvement Project  
A common language for learning throughout the school  
Developing Effective learners  
Building Learning Power  
Learning Champion: interactive teaching and learning  
Yr 7 Tutor-time Activity book