

# Principal's Sabbatical Report

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## **Purpose of the Sabbatical**

The purpose of my sabbatical was to investigate how schools are implementing the revised New Zealand Curriculum with an emphasis on the Future Focus dimension of the Principles, and ELearning.

I chose these topics to compare what we are presently doing at Cloverlea School with what is happening in schools in other areas of Aoteroa/New Zealand. In particular I wanted to find out how other schools are giving effect to both issues.

## **Background**

**Part 1-** In reference to the Future Focus dimension, at Cloverlea School we have taken into consideration what we consider to be the issues that confront future generations when identifying the Big Ideas to be included in our school's curriculum. These Big Ideas are used as the major focus when planning learning programmes. Sustainability, citizenship and globalisation are key components of the curriculum at Cloverlea School.

The question I was focused on is- "How are other schools incorporating these Future Focus dimensions into their curriculum delivery documents?"

I wanted to determine what is being included and why.

**Part 2-** The revised New Zealand Curriculum states that- "Schools should explore not only how ICT can supplement traditional ways of teaching but also how it can open up new and different ways of learning". Page 36

The major purpose of my review was to look at how schools that have been involved in an ICTPD cluster, or are identified as schools that are successfully integrating ICT into their programmes, are using ICT to open up new and different ways of learning.

## **Method**

The main method for gathering information was visiting schools and discussing with the principal a set of pre-determined questions. I contacted principals of four schools in Christchurch and four in the wider Auckland area. All of the principals were more than happy to have me visit their schools.

I chose to visit schools that I had heard about while attending conferences, through reputation or recommended by colleagues. I arranged to interview the principal of one school during the morning and another in the afternoon of the same day. I asked each principal the same questions that I had organised prior to my visit.

In addition to school visits I read through some of the reports of school stories that are online through New Zealand Curriculum Online.

## **Questions:**

The following questions were asked and discussed with each principal.

- What is the main focus of your school's curriculum delivery (How are things done around here and how was this arrived at)?
- What guiding documentation do you have to guide teachers in their job of teaching?
- Is there an emphasis on the sustainability component of the future focus principle?
- How is IT integrated into classroom programmes? Is there a prescriptive programme for IT?

## Findings

### School 1

This school has established a set of beliefs / values that have been developed and unpacked by the staff. The beliefs and values are shared with the children who have an understanding of them.

There is a set of very clear guidelines for each curriculum area in a Staff Handbook that staff use to inform their programmes and planning. The guidelines are quite prescriptive on what the expectations are for each curriculum area. There is a clear vision of what a Year 6 leaver should be.

Key Competencies have been identified with key points on a continuum. There are guidelines on what teachers will do.

This school has reflection time at the end of each day.

There is an emphasis on citizenship, globalization and sustainability which are delivered through a Thematic Curriculum. This is conceptually based with an emphasis on enduring understandings.

Teachers integrate IT into programmes. Some classrooms use interactive boards where others have data projectors. This is dependent on personal choice and confidence.

One point of difference with this school is the employment of a lead teacher in the area of development for the year. This position is advertised as a fixed position for the year and is open for anyone to apply. This person is charged with leading the school in the area of development for the year.

### School 2

This was a smaller school than the others I visited. Programme delivery is based around an Inquiry Model that is constantly under review. The school is heavily into community consultation and community involvement.

Through consultation a 2020 Vision was established. This involved identifying what a student leaving school in 2020 might need. The Vision links the school's Values, and Principles to Actions (Key Competencies and Curriculum Programmes). Key Competencies are the roots of learning that nurture and support growth towards independence and maturity. Each of the Key Competencies has been unpacked into dimensions and three levels of indicators- Forming, Shaping and Flying. Teachers select dimensions and indicators to be taught as part of their planning.

There is a focus on Literacy and Numeracy as stand alone learning programmes. Inquiry supports Literacy and Numeracy and incorporates the other curriculum areas ensuring there is a balanced coverage of these.

Inquiry is delivered through six Big Ideas which are covered over a two year cycle. Health and Well-being are covered through a mixed model of inquiry and teacher directed programmes. The six Big Ideas have links to the New Zealand Curriculum, Learning Areas and Strands.

The school has documentation that clearly informs teachers and community about the delivery of its curriculum.

### **School 3**

This school has focused on clarifying understandings, values and beliefs that relate to the New Zealand Curriculum. Having a clear understanding of concepts such as what it is to be a “21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner” and “Child Centred Learning” have been unpacked with all staff. There has also been an emphasis on Andragogy (behavior of adults) rather than Pedagogy which the principal feels is covered in the curriculum document.

The staff work through a curriculum area when it is being planned for. Teams unpack the essence statement to identify “key enduring learning concepts”, not facts. Use of the SOLO Taxonomy is used across the school and was evident in the classrooms I visited.

There is a rigorous process of community consultation each year in Term 4. Outcomes from this process guide planning and programmes for the next year.

ICT has not been a focus for this school in recent years.

For a more in-depth report on this school’s journey you can find it on New Zealand Curriculum Online and go to Waimairi School. This is well worth your time.

### **School 4**

I met with the Deputy Principals of this school as the Principal was away at the time of my visit.

This school had concerns about the delivery of the curriculum. They set about addressing these by visiting schools, consulting with the community and using a consultancy firm to guide them. From this they developed their vision, values and beliefs. These overarch all that is done.

LETS- Learning, Exploring Together to Succeed guides their programmes.

The school has a “Curriculum Plan” handbook. This provides very clear and concise guidelines on the Principles, Values, Key Competencies, Teaching and Learning Beliefs and Teaching and Learning Programmes for all curriculum areas. The school has developed a “Common Timetable” for all classes and lists the rationale behind this.

The Teaching and Learning Beliefs section is very full and unpacks each belief through a Shared Philosophical/Pedagogical Understanding statement. Accompanying this is a Growing Practices list which identifies key points for teachers. Four Contexts for Learning have been identified which in turn have been broken down on a chart under the headings- Deep Understanding, Curriculum Links and Outcomes (Levels 1 to 3)

The school is organised into curriculum teams which plan units of work. Planning focuses on Key Competencies and Enduring Understandings. Teachers use a backward planning model. The units are given to all teachers to implement. Future Focus principles are built into the programme. An extensive overview of their Inquiry Model is included in the handbook.

ICT is well established in this school. It has been involved in an ICT cluster and is well resourced for the integration of ICT. Unfortunately I didn’t have time to view classrooms but I was informed that teachers regularly use ICT in a variety of ways.

## **School 5**

This was a very large school that has experienced huge roll growth over the past few years. Numbers have now stabilised.

The school has developed a shared vision using an outside agency. The school is part of the international "Teacher Designed Schools Network". Staff identify the What, Why and How they teach. Staff do this, not the Principal. The process generates staff interaction and involvement. Staff vote on what will be done and research it. The Principal monitor's progress to ensure it happens.

An Inquiry Approach is used for major topics. Inquiry is based on a conceptual approach with strands covered in topics. Numeracy is a separate subject. The Key Competencies are happening all of the time as part of the school's values but each topic has an emphasis on a related competency.

The leadership team outlines the next year's programme in Term 4 of each year. Tracking of previous years is used to ensure coverage. A Big Idea is generated. Staff identify topics from the leadership team's map to produce a "Big Picture Plan" on large sheets and these are displayed for all to see. Teams use Big Picture Plan to generate their team plan for their classes.

ICT is deliberately planned for. A group of older children produce a weekly news programme that is viewed across the school.

## **School 6**

This school has a focus on literacy and numeracy. For topics they have developed Infusion Learning with an expectation that only one Inquiry is taken each year. Infusion Learning is based around Big Ideas with the topics running from mid-term to mid-term. There is a gap of one to two weeks between each Infusion topic during which a school-wide theme is taken.

Guidelines for creating an integrated unit of work have been developed in a flow chart format. Teachers work through the process to ensure all components are considered. Consideration is given to Key Concepts, Achievement Objectives, Context (rich task), ICT, Values (The school's 4C's), assessment processes, GATE and CWSN, Literacy and Numeracy demands, performance indicators, use of SOLO taxonomy, and evaluation. An Infusion Learning Unit Plan format is used for planning. Future Focus issues are clearly considered and incorporated as part of the planning process.

I was given the opportunity to talk with a group of students at this school. They were able to tell me what they were learning and why they were learning it. The children have a voice in the learning programmes at this school.

ICT is integrated into programmes. This school has a weekly news presentation put together by selected students.

## **School 7**

This school aims to have a distinct point of difference when compared with other schools. The vision and philosophy are built around this.

When new entrant children arrive at school they are in classes that use Barbara Brands, "Skills for Foundation" programme. The children continue in this programme until they are able to master the skills at which time they move into a so called normal classroom. The theory behind this is that children are not ready to function and learn in a normal classroom until they have mastered the foundation skills.

This school employs a specialist ICT person full time, as well as a music and art specialist. The school has a fully resourced music room set up for classes. The music room incorporates instruments set up ready for a rock band (guitars, drums, etc.). The school is being remodeled block by block to cater for the programmes it is putting in place.

The curriculum is conceptually based around a theme that runs across the year. The theme is broken into topics by teams which plan for these accordingly. This is a "high trust" model.

This school is well set up for ICT. A large screen TV is in each classroom with some having data projectors as well. The screens are able to be used interactively. The school is set up with roaming ip addresses which allows connection to the network from anywhere within the school. I observed children and teachers using the equipment while being shown around the school.

## **School 8**

Red Beach School has been used as an example in a variety of ways to support schools in the development of their vision and curriculum. I visited Red Beach School to discuss how they had developed their documentation. I am not going to write at length here as their web site has all of the information on it.

If you have not viewed the web site I encourage you to do so as it is very informative. The use of local features to depict different aspects has been done very well. Consultation with the children at the school and local community has provided them with input into the development of the guiding documents.

ICT is integrated into programmes and I observed children working on individual pages on the schools intranet.

## **Conclusion**

What did my findings tell me?

All of the schools I visited had established a set of beliefs / values that over arch everything that happens within the school. These have been developed in consultation with the community and in most cases with students.

Each school had a set of clear guidelines in a form that suited the school. The guidelines support teachers with the development of programmes for the children.

In most of the schools topics were based conceptually around identified Big Ideas or Enduring Understandings. Topics were presented through an Inquiry Model that had been developed by the school. Key Competencies are integrated into the programme and in most cases are infused into the culture of the school. The Future Focus dimensions are integrated into the programme through the Big Ideas.

The use of ICT varied considerably between the schools. This depended on availability of resources and the level of importance the school gave it. I did not have the opportunity to view ICT in action in some of the schools visited due to the time I was in the school so I relied on what was told to me.

There are points of difference between what schools are doing and how they are doing it but I conclude that there are more similarities than differences.

## **Acknowledgments**

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I also thank my deputy principal and other school staff, who stepped up to carry out the extra duties in my absence.

I also acknowledge and thank the principals of the following schools who welcomed me into their schools and willingly gave their time to share expertise and knowledge:

- Thorrington School
- Southbridge School
- Waimairi School
- Cotswald School ( a special thank you to the two Deputy Principals who met with me)
- Baverstock Oaks School
- Cockle Bay School
- Arahoe School
- Red Beach School



## **References:**

- **The New Zealand Curriculum**
- **NZ Curriculum Online**
- **Websites of the schools visited**
- **Various readings on Andragogy from the internet**
- **enGauge:21Century Skills**