

Sabbatical report

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1. Purpose: To use the time to simply take stock of where I am now and find the most appropriate course of action for Huntly College moving forward. Visit several schools and institutions both overseas and within NZ to answer many of the questions I have.

Executive summary

Huntly College and my journey so far

- Huntly College opened in 1953. Rapidly developed (50's, 60's and 70's) and expanded to meet the needs of a vibrant and economically prosperous area (mining, agriculture etc)
- During the 80's, Huntly continued to enjoy prosperous times. The power site was being constructed and employment opportunities were plentiful. Mining was in full swing with several smaller private operations co existing with large operations. Huntly College roll was in excess of 800 and discussions were held with the Dept. Of Education regards increasing capacity to cater for a 1000 students. I began teaching at Huntly College as a 3rd year teacher in 1985.
- 90's and the economic downturn affected this town badly. Power site was completed and the operation requires minimal man power to operate, mines were closed and restructuring was overwhelming. Employment opportunities dwindled badly. The small town Rotowaro for example no longer existed. The name 'Huntly' conjures different images when compared to the early prosperous days. The inevitable roll decline and local parents began looking for alternatives for education including Hamilton schools (this trend has continued virtually unabated since). 1991 roll approaching 500.
- 2000 onwards has been a period of instability for the college. Four principals within 18 months (2003 – 2004). Stand down / suspension statistics made national media and community confidence in the college was at all time low. Roll decline continues. (2003 July Roll approx. 280). ERO were annual visitors, 1999 – 2004. Review in 2005 stated 'normal cycle' This was a significant boost for the college.
- 2004 principal position was re advertised. I began in July. Roll count stated 284. I could actually count 140 students attending regularly. New board was appointed

immediately prior to my commencement. The college had a ministry appointed advisor to assist with the troubles faced by the college

- Immediate priority tasks included
 - addressing Health and Safety issues, staff and students.
 - Establishing a timetable to engage students
 - Repairing a damaged community pride and confidence in the college

Since 2004 the college has much to be rightly proud of including;

- The 2009 ERO report states '*The flexible approach to timetabling allows students to identify a variety of learning pathways for Years 10 to 13 curriculum levels based on their career interests*'
- Teacher turnover has been well below national averages
- Stand down / suspension rates are well below normal rates
- NCEA Level 1 and 2 achievement / success has risen steadily since 2003 (data not included)
- Maori achievement has shown improvement overall
- Community confidence is showing gradual improvement (much still to be done)

Sabbatical opportunity has allowed me the space and time:

- ✓ To re evaluate and prioritise.
- ✓ Visit schools overseas and read / research articles relevant and applicable to the Huntly College context
- ✓ To re visit goals and assess any progress made.
- ✓ To present a renewed vision for Huntly College.

Summary of key findings

Key finding 1

Staffing: the key to success i.e. what is a successful school is staffing. Specifically, the passion, their devotion, their ability to form relationships, their personal motivation and their desire to be recognised. Successful low decile schools have these staff in their schools. These teachers fall into broad categories:

The role of a teacher

The solution therefore, in order of what is possible;

1. **Mentor / Role model / Extra curricula:** Staff must wherever and when ever show something of themselves to the students. This could be as a coach, a mentor, a tutor or something else. This must be at a time which students can see that they care enough to give up something for me. This does not occur within any staffing policy or collective contract, it must fall outside these parameters. For these teachers, many inadequacies can be covered over. Colleagues will run and support these teachers because they see the true value. These teachers put student outcomes first and foremost. Feedback is appreciated but it is not what drives them. These staff will be seen at school late at night, doing dishes, talking to parents in the car park or under a tree while a parent has a smoke! They will be seen at 6 a.m. in the morning picking up students and others delivering here, there and everywhere. Manaakitanga (care for the person i.e. the student) is paramount in the eyes of the student. For some staff, this is an uncomfortable position to locate yourself.

2. **Super teacher:** Where a staff member for what ever reason cannot comply with the above, they need to step into the next level. I describe this as the super teacher. Graeme Aitkin (Auckland University) talks about style. There is more than just style because credibility based on performance will allow style to dominate. A super teacher is a teacher who has achieved notoriety and credibility through past performances. Teachers in this category often exist as loners. They do not need continual and ongoing professional collegiality. This category is not restricted to the 'older generation'. Student outcomes are important but equally as important is their own survival. Based on feedback, they will thrive and continue to perform at or near the top of their game. Many of this group are conciliatory enough not to make comment for others who do not reach their standard. These staff are often those that will champion the cause e.g. change. When super teachers concur with management, change is possible. These are the staff who will be the agents of change.
3. **The Bully:** teachers who lack both student credibility and apparent super teacher status uses alternative approaches based on individual stylised approaches to teaching. These approaches vary depending on the circumstances but often include intimidation tactics (proximity and body positioning, body language and gestures / comments that are designed to remind all who is in charge). Characteristics may also include boorish behaviour, loud voice and will usually teach from the front. Student outcomes is not the most important factor for these teachers. Many will state publicly that it is! What drives and motivates them is the feel good factor. They run on adrenaline and desire positive feedback. They need to be reminded they are good teachers and will often display traits that express displeasure including sulkiness, aggressiveness, medical conditions that prevent regular appearances at work etc. For the bully, the 'wash up' at the end may not clearly establish effectiveness. Student outcomes will not easily distinguish them. For some, not many, students, this pedagogy works! It is often this group (and the conformists) who will make noises about performance pay.
4. **The conformist:** many teachers fall into this category and do not have the heart for the job. Many will tell others, they do this as a form of confirming to themselves they are doing a good job. They will appear to openly honest and compliant while inwardly they battle with anxiety and depression. Salary and conditions predominate the reasons why they stay in the profession. For many, the style of teaching is haphazard. For some experienced teachers, they have had training and have tried new approaches. Simply they cannot do it because it is not student outcomes which drive them. For many despair and a lack of belief they could do another job as well is a concern. For the conformist, they will rarely show up as incompetent because they do not allow themselves to be this bad. For many, comment about student behaviour, parenting and other perceived reasons why their job is so difficult will often dominate any conversation.
5. **The lost:** as a principal, dealing with incompetence is a challenge. Many of the teachers in this category are simply left alone. They exist in our schools and are not respected by colleagues, communities or students.

Staffing is the key

This came as no surprise but maintaining energy and ensuring that staff are high performing and expecting high performance was revealing. Schools that are successful (as determined by data and statistical analysis) have a large number of teachers in category 1 and 2

School management (BOT, Leaders) can support these teachers with adequate resources but this is not what makes them successful. They are generally self reliant and innovative. They need goals and achievable targets and above all else, they need time with students.

Key finding 2

Leadership: including MOE, BOT but most influentially the principal.

Again it is no real surprise that schools considered to be agentic and successful display strong leadership. The adaptability and versatility of effective leaders is evident.

Huntly College 2011 moving forward

Recommendations for development of a renewed vision for Huntly College

- ✓ Revise planning documents, ensure that goals and targets are achievable and they are not simply compliance type goals. Ensure they are understood and simple
- ✓ Establish and improve links to the community, particularly parents, ensuring that their needs are being addressed. (links to be extended to include key stake holders such as Solid Energy, Tainui, Genesis etc)
- ✓ Ensure that planning does not impinge of the time staff have with students. Rearranging the 'deck chairs' scenario applies annually when looking at time tables
- ✓ Communication and resourcing for teachers: ensuring that the best we can afford (\$) is spent wisely leading to meaningful outcomes
- ✓ As a leader (aka; CEO of this organisation) I need to step back and not get involved with too much time consuming management activity. Realisation of potential among staff requires careful and considerate planning. Empowering others to fill any voids that are most easily filled by myself in many cases.
- ✓ Data driven focus: the use of past and present data is invaluable when determining school priorities
- ✓ Maintain an appropriate balance between legal requirements (NAGs) and holistic education (values, co-curricula etc)
- ✓ Acknowledgment of effort and success (staff / students): making this a priority for planning is fundamental and essential.

