

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY**  
**AND**  
**A VIEW OF MERCY HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES**  
**AND SAMOA**

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### **Introduction and Acknowledgements**

Having Term 3 in 2009 as a Sabbatical Term was a wonderful opportunity to explore a number of professional development opportunities.

I was keen to update my professional knowledge by attending a leadership course, "Leadership, an Evolving Vision" at Harvard University which had been recommended to me by colleagues. My attendance at this course was sponsored by the Board of Trustees at St Mary's College. Grateful thanks go to them.

Ensuring the development of buildings is responsive to curriculum trends is an ongoing challenge for Catholic Schools. I was keen to see how Catholic schools, particularly Mercy schools, in the United States coped with this challenge.

To gain a different perspective of what Mercy education is achieving, I visited a fellow Mercy secondary college in Samoa. This was an excellent opportunity to observe first hand the education and needs of students at Paul XI College in Leulumoega.

The Board of Proprietors (St Mary's College Limited) supported my visit to these Catholic schools and I am grateful for their assistance.

In my absence our two very capable Deputy Principals, Brian Nolan and Lorraine Pound, undertook five weeks each as Acting Principal. My thanks go to Lorraine, Brian and Sonja Consedine (the other member of Senior Management Team) for picking up extra duties to enable me to have this opportunity. Lyn Stevens, my Personal Assistant was invaluable in keeping me in the loop when necessary.

I have always been conscious of my woeful lack of knowledge of Te Reo Maori and despite only being able to attend six of the twelve two hour introductory sessions in Te Reo Maori at Auckland University, I am now more knowledgeable, though I still have a long way to go to grasp the language significant to all New Zealanders.

### **Leadership an Evolving Vision**

This course at Harvard University has been developed over a number of years and is the best opportunity I have had to hear a wide variety of excellent speakers on school related matters. Participants were allocated to groups and each group met everyday

after the sessions to discuss and reflect on the lectures. On the second day all participants were taken to a farm about two hours out of Boston for a day organised by “Project Adventure”. This day was designed to be personally stimulating and to help us to work together as colleagues for the week. We spent the day in our different groups and in my opinion it certainly achieved its goal.

Throughout the seven day course there were a number of stimulating lectures. These lectures are referenced below. A synopsis is given of the content and a name is attributed that can be followed up for further content information.

**1. Emerging Technologies and Transformative Education. Lecturer: Chris Dede.**

Points Noted: The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that are most important for job success when hiring high school graduates are:

Work Ethic: 80%  
Collaboration: 75%  
Oral Communication: 70%  
Social Responsibility: 63%  
Reading Comprehension: 63%  
English Language: 62% and  
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: 58%

Interestingly enough the 20<sup>th</sup> century skills that students recently hired were deficient in included:

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: 70%  
Oral Communication: 53%  
Work Ethic: 44%  
Social Responsibility: 44%  
Reading Comprehension: 38%  
Collaboration: 35%  
English Language: 21%

This was of interest as it highlighted that critical thinking and problem solving are crucial for our students to have. Oral communication was also very important and this has not generally been recognised in the past.

Research further shows that the following 21<sup>st</sup> century skills will become even more important in the next five years:

Critical Thinking: 78%  
IT: 77%  
Health and Wellness: 76%  
Collaboration: 74%  
Innovation: 74%  
Personal Financial Responsibility: 72%

Chris Dede spoke about the advantages of the new Web 2 programmes. He mentioned the sharing that happens with social book marking, photo video

sharing, social networking and writers workshops. The thinking and the co-creating that occurs in the wikis, in collaborative file creation, in mash ups and collective media creation and collaborative social change communities provides great learning opportunities. He went on to say the Web 2 redefines what, how and with whom we learn. Almost any piece of information can now be found online in less than a minute, perhaps intermingled with inaccurate and biased data. So what core knowledge should every student learn to prepare for 21<sup>st</sup> work and citizenship? “Web 2 Knowledge is constructed by negotiating consensus articulation across various points of view. So how do we help the students understand the differences between facts, opinions and values and appreciate inter-relationships among them go beyond accuracy to create meaning?”

He further discussed the next generation of interfaces for immersive learning. This includes wearing wireless devices linked to smart objectives for augmented reality. We already have in New Zealand:

- Wii Technology.
- Multi User Virtual Environments – immersion and virtual contents with digital artefacts and avatar based identity.
- Virtual Reality.

Chris talked about overlay devices, “wireless mobile devices offering substantial power at a fraction of the cost for laptops for greater mobility. These provide entertainment and learning anywhere and one person to one device becomes affordable in education”.

All of the new technologies point to a different model of pedagogy. One where:

- Experiences are essential, rather than information as pre-digested experience.
- Students walk the tightrope between simplicity and complexity.
- Knowledge is situated in the context and distributed across community.
- Reputation, experience and accomplishments are a measure of quality rather than tests and exam papers.

## **2. Improving the Technical Core – What’s a Leader to Do. Lecturer: Richard Elmore**

I found this session of enormous interest as it looked at how excellence is achieved, rather than just reaching the standard. Important points emphasised were:

- It’s hard to change instructional practice by changing structure, it is better to change the practice and then change the structure.

- It is important for Principals to look at the teaching that is going on in the school at the micro level and spend at least a day a week in classrooms.
- He likened the culture of educational practice in the school to medical rounds. In this he means that there is a shared understanding about high quality practice and that everyone in the team works together to ensure there is a shared body of knowledge and everybody is accountable to the community. He means that the teachers do not just do what they want to do, they do what they all agree to do.
- Teaching is too individualised and we learn best when we learn in groups. Educators need to learn to work in groups.

Professor Elmore took us through research results which show that it matters five to six times more which teacher you get as to which school you go to. All of this points to the fact that to improve achievement what has to be looked at in-depth is the teaching going on within each individual school.

Professor Elmore went on to describe how to observe good teaching in the classroom. He emphasised that task predicts performance. Principals when they are visiting classrooms should look particularly at the tasks given to see if they are high level tasks and have a high cognitive demand. Often students are being asked to answer questions that reproduce teacher examples. With this type of task it is difficult to know what students understand and if they have the procedural knowledge. It is much better to give tasks that involve more complex thinking so to determine the student understanding.

What Professor Elmore said is in line with Best Evidence Synthesis Research done by Professor Vivian Robinson and Associates. These New Zealand researchers have shown that it is the teacher in the classroom that makes the greatest difference to student achievement. Schools wanting to improve achievement of students therefore should focus on the pedagogy in the classroom rather than on more structural aspects.

### 3. **Case Study Approach to Look at Aligning Resources to Improve Student Achievement. Lecturer: James Honan.**

James spoke of the need to align resources to improve student achievement. To do this good budget conversations are necessary and the budget must be linked to the strategic plan. The outcomes for student achievement must be measurable differences. It is important to evaluate the student programmes and the impact of what those programmes have had on the mission, the core values and beliefs of the school. We should ask ourselves how we know this impact has occurred. What James Honan spoke of is very much in line with what happens in New Zealand regarding annual plans and accountability measures in the annual report at the end of each financial year.

4. **“During the Year Assessments - Shifting the Conversation to Results”  
Lecturer: Kim Marshall.**

Kim Marshall presented us with two questions. The first was “what percentage of your students are getting effective teaching now?” The other question was “for which students does effective teaching make the biggest difference,” that is who benefits most from effective teaching? He said the common response is for people to believe that it is actually for two thirds of the students that effective teaching makes the biggest difference. However it is most important for the low achieving students.

He spoke about Finland having very good results because they build fall back positions for students who are falling behind. They have tutorials on the same day. Suggestions he made to identify whether students had learnt anything in a class included: exit cards where a teacher questions students on the lesson and students write the response on a piece of paper, leaving it with the teacher so that the teacher can see how each individual student has understood what they have been taught. Another technique he discussed was a folded notebook. The most powerful study technique is reading then closing the book and writing notes on what you have just read.

Kim introduced us to clickers where an audience (the class) are given clickers with different responses – A, B or C for instance and a question is put to the class. They respond by clicking their option and its read cumulatively and automatically on graphs, so that the teacher can see the level of understanding in the class. He also emphasised the importance of common assessments and using assessment tasks to give formative assessment information.

It is important to follow up formative assessments with further teaching on issues that students found difficult. All assessments should be scheduled with analysis and re-teaching time to occur immediately. He emphasised again the best chance to improve achievement is by having immediate on the spot assessments during the class time when the students are being taught. Summative assessments mean instruction has finished and there are no more chances for students to improve their achievement.

5. **Lecturer: Professor Kasturi Rangan.**

Professor Rangan led us in a discussion about an extremely successful non profit organisation – a hospital in India. We analysed elements of successful leadership and management of this large complicated organisation and gained an understanding of the importance of developing and articulating a clear mission, vision and strategy for successful performance.

6. **Improving Ourselves in the “Improvement Education” Engaging our Own Immunity to Change. Lecturer: Robert Keegan.**

Robert Keegan began by saying that studies show that even when patients are told they will die if they do not change their ways, only one in seven will actually change. We can assume that six patients wanted to live, they just did

not change. Robert posed various questions for consideration. Why is change so difficult even when we are generally committed to it? How can we do a better job of closing the gap between what we intend and what we are actually able to bring about?

Robert took us through an activity to identify areas we may need to change in and where we find it difficult to change. The areas we find it difficult to change are because we are making assumptions and those assumptions may not necessarily be correct. He said a lesson for leadership is that our staff may not change, may in fact appear to be standing in the way of change, but perhaps this is because they are working to support hidden commitments. We need to acknowledge that the only way we can change is to understand the big assumptions we have, to challenge them and grow to have new assumptions.

**7. Brain Scams: Myths and Knowledge about the Brain and Learning. Lecturer: Kirt Fischer.**

Society is looking to brain science, genetics and cognitive science to inform and improve education. There is much to be learnt from this research about learning and teaching but there are also many myths and scams that use brain science illegitimately. Research involving children who have lost one side of their brain but are still able to develop in a cognitive normal way debunks some of the left brain, right brain theories. For example, if the right brain of a child was removed according to some of the right brain, left brain theories, that child should not be any good at art. Children in this situation have been shown to be skilled at art. He said that people speak of the differences between male and female brains but there are greater differences within genders than there are between genders. The brain continues to have plasticity until we get very old. Other points made included:

- Looking at faces is very important for emotional and social integration. Adolescents are not very good at this.
- Emotions are tied to cognition and intelligence. Facial expressions are a reflection of emotion.
- Emotions are a major field of research.
- Smiling makes you feel flexible, happy and safe. In a relationship, if 10% of the interactions are negative, there will be difficulties. To be a positive relationship over 90% of the interactions have to be positive.
- Relationships with teachers are very important. If students like the teacher they are more likely to learn.
- Homework that is challenging and practices new concepts is worthwhile.
- Emotion drives learning.

**8. Beyond Benevolence: A New Take on Inclusive Education. Lecturers: Norman Kunc and Emma van der Klift.**

Norman Kunc

Norman was born with cerebral palsy and initially attended a segregated school for children with physical disabilities. At the age of 13 he was integrated into a regular school and from there went on to complete a Bachelors Degree in Humanities and a Masters of Science Degree in Family Therapy. His big message was that if leaders make schools where students are proud to belong, then inclusion will become a reality and achievement will increase.

He also said that having disabled students in a class who were not capable of high academic results, signalled to other students that they did not have to achieve high academic results to be members of the community. This meant that there was less stress on the students who were not disabled and therefore they would also achieve better results. A quote from Norman was “disabled kids come into a perfect world and screw it up and remind us what life is all about”.

Emma van der Klift

Emma outlined some of the skills that hostage negotiators use and said it would help if leaders practice these skills so that they are less reactive and more responsive when dealing with students and colleagues. Emma spoke about the safe schools initiative in the United States. Some of the aspects of that initiative are:

- There is a strong emphasis against the code of silence.
- Actual action against bullying.
- Trusting relationships between every student and a caring adult at the school.
- Creation of a mechanism for developing and sustaining safe school climates.
- Involvement of all members of the school community in planning, creating and sustaining a positive school culture.
- There are no profiles of shooters.

She spoke about restorative practices that Australia and New Zealand have been using. Sometimes the disciplinary systems in a school get in the way of encouraging a sense of belonging. We isolate children who misbehave. Detentions rooms do not work to change behaviour. What students learn is that they do not want to be caught again. Emma emphasised the importance of building relationships. She also gave us the dos and do nots that hostage negotiators use and which could be very useful in the school situation. She spoke of giving students runaway lanes like road builders use, so that if trucks lose the brakes they can take off and go into a net. Students need to be involved in planning interventions so that they can manage their behaviour.

They also need a runaway lane or time out so that they can go somewhere and self manage their behaviour.

**9. The Why, What and How of School Family and Community Partnerships. Lecturer: Karen Mapp.**

Karen outlined current research regarding the link between family, school, community partnerships and student achievement. She also gave us specific strategies and resources about how to create trusting and respective partnerships among various stakeholders and school staff.

- Successful students talked about significant teachers or principals and also about their parents or caregivers.
- Parents that are involved at high school are significant for successful students, despite what teenagers tell their parents.
- Schools struggle to get families involved because some people do not believe it is important.
- When parents are engaged attendance is increased.
- We have to look in the mirror at our core beliefs before we look at families. Do we want parents involved in our school?
- Schools that thrive are those that have high relational trust.

**10. Going Home and Taking Charge. Lecturer: Jerome Murphy.**

Jerome began the session by looking at a case study at Hammond Community College (a fictitious school) with a lot of problems and asked us to analyse the situation. The Principal had dealt with a number of issues within the school. Jerome took us through the six tasks of leadership:

1. Identifying institutional purpose.
2. Facilitative strategic development.
3. Tackling adaptive challenges.
4. Mobilising political support.
5. Building organisational capability.
6. Orchestrating daily operations.

He left us with some things to remember about leadership:

1. If you want appreciation get a dog.
2. Put yourself in the shoes of others.
3. Resistance is often the sign of integrity.
4. When you feel the urge to explain - listen.
5. If you do not listen, others will not listen.
6. Meeting purposes: learn, feedback and problem solve.

**Conclusion**

Having seven days entirely focused on professional development was invaluable. Listening to speakers who were well researched and well regarded in respective



different fields was inspiring. The time for reflection over seven days was also invaluable.

In Boston I met many fellow Principals from the United States and one from Australia. These Principals were part of my study group. Every day after the sessions, we met to reflect on what had been said and to discuss and debate the issues. This was a very important part of the experience at Harvard. I hope in the years ahead we will keep in touch and continue to learn from each other.

## **Mercy High School, Baltimore**

In the time I was in the United States I visited Mercy High School in Baltimore. The school was founded by the Sisters of Mercy. It was opened in 1960 and continues a long history of Mercy education in Baltimore, first established at Mt St Agnes in 1867. It is one of 40 Mercy secondary schools located in 20 states in the continental United States and six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Mercy High School in Baltimore is committed to educating young women of confidence and competence, with belief in their ability to make a difference in the world, as women of faith, justice and compassion.

The school has 435 students and is situated in nice surroundings with two sports fields. They have an auditorium seating 690 and have 90 teachers on the staff, with many support staff and very little government funding. Fundraising is very important to the College and they have a special fundraising office run by three staff. The former Principal of the College is now the President and is mainly concerned with fundraising and board finance. The Principal is responsible for the academic side of the school and the day to day running.

Points noted when I was there (unfortunately in holiday time) were:

- Students get 30 minutes for lunch and can not go outside.
- They have two lunchtimes which are staggered.
- Everywhere in the College donor names were prominent.

Walking around the school I noticed that each graduating year had a photo. These photos lined the corridors and it meant that there was something tangible in the school for students who had graduated in a particular year to come back and have a look at. Mercy High School also had a display board of current students in the College along with photos of their mothers who were past pupils and some brief information about the mother and daughter. I was shown around by Miss Jo Ann Lazzeri. Jo Ann is the Vice Principal for Information Services at the College. They have four Sisters of Mercy working within the College.

Mercy High School Baltimore has a special connection with St Mary's College because Sr Carol Wheeler visited St Mary's in 2001 when Sr Mary Neven was Principal. Sister Carol is the President of Mercy College.

There did not seem to be any local state examinations for entrance to University, but the College was focusing on ensuring students had the skills to be successful in the

various University Entrance Examinations. Not having a set curriculum meant that there was the possibility of variability from one class to another.

My impressions throughout the visit were of a school very focussed on ensuring its past pupils had a strong connection with the school. On the website there was an area where deceased alumni could be noted and prayers asked for the families. Reunions were also noted on their website with photos. I believe we could learn a lot from the way the alumni remained connected to the College.

## **Mercy High School San Francisco**

The Sisters of Mercy have been in San Francisco since 1854 and Mercy High School was opened in 1952. It currently has 530 students from many diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The earthquake in 1989 had an impact on the school buildings and the cost of strengthening these buildings has been a huge burden to the school. Again, like the Mercy College in Baltimore, I found a strong emphasis on fundraising. It is very important for the financial stability of the school. Like Mercy College in Baltimore there was a lot of evidence of family donations. San Francisco went even further than Baltimore by naming individual rooms after sponsors. The fundraising is necessary for teachers' salaries and for the operating costs of the school.

The school has a strong Arts programme. Dance is taught as part of the compulsory curriculum. This school has a connection with a medical school in which students who have an interest in medicine are supported and encouraged from when they first enter the school. They also regularly visit the medical school. They are trying to set up something similar for the very talented students in the Arts.

The Principal spoke about the need for improving literacy and of how they have a special programme where the whole school, staff and students, read a particular book. The book is chosen with a social justice theme. The author is invited to speak to the students at assembly about the book.

There is a strong emphasis in this College on students taking leadership in a number of areas. Everywhere I went I could see evidence of student work on the wall and it appeared to be a very vibrant school community.

In speaking to the Principal I noted that every year a different graduating class come back to the school for a one day reunion. This class is the one that graduated 50 years ago. By this stage these women have often had families and are well established in their careers and are thinking about donations to their previous alma mater.

## **Paul XI College, Samoa**

Paul XI College is situated at Leulumoega. In Samoa there was a Catholic Senior College that closed at the end of 2008. This has meant that schools such as Paul XI have kept the senior students for the first time this year. There are seven year levels at the College, similar to our Year 7 to 13. Altogether 150 boys and girls attend Paul XI. There are approximately 13 teachers and the maximum pay for a teacher is 12,000 tala. This is equivalent to about \$7,000(NZ). There is one class at each year level. School starts at 8.30 in the morning and finishes at 2.30 in the afternoon.

The reason I visited Paul XI College was to see how we could provide effective support. A number of the school buildings have recently been upgraded but the technology and art building is still to be renovated. The school ICT room does not have internet access and so the students are limited to using the computers as word processors. The Samoan Government gives very little money to the school, approximately \$12,000 (NZ) a year. The rest of the money has to come from student fees. Students are charged 300 tala a year.

St. Mary's will continue to liaise with the Principal and teachers of Paul XI and respond where possible in ways that will help them effectively deliver the curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

I strongly recommend the Harvard course. It was a great way of learning about the latest research and reflecting on the many facets of school leadership. Visiting other schools is always interesting. From the visits to schools in the United States I learnt how we could better market ourselves to our past pupils. From the visit to Paul XI in Samoa I witnessed that schools in New Zealand are much better resourced and are in a position to help our Pacific neighbours.

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