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Sabbatical Term 3 2011

The BIG QUESTION

*"Quality self-review –
What does it look like in practice and how does
school leadership impact on self-review
programmes?"*

Executive Summary

Given that self-review is said to be a crucial link to school improvement and student learning and achievement, it is important that schools carry out high quality reviews. Quality self-review should be guided by established and well-understood procedures, and the purposeful gathering, analysis and use of information. Quality self-review uses evidence to affirm what is going well and also to elicit change that positively impacts on learning and achievement.

Effective leadership is a crucial element in self review and evidence shows that leaders in high achieving schools have an emphasis on systematic monitoring of progress and results to improve programmes. It is also imperative for leaders to be actively involved with their teachers as the leading learners in their schools. Although the principal of a school is the designated leader, effective educational leadership can be a collective, shared endeavour.

There is no prescribed way of undertaking self-review but it is my position that schools would benefit from sharing good practice. The challenge is, according to David Hargreaves, to find effective ways of ensuring this happens.

Why did I chose this topic

According to the Education Review Office, quality school self-review needs a high level advocate or champion to become fully embedded in schools operations. It can;

- Improve student outcomes.
- Improve teacher performance, which impacts on student outcomes.

While our last Education Review was very positive, it was identified that although our school is reflecting on effectiveness of programmes and practices, we would benefit from a more systematic approach to self-review.

Acknowledgments

This Sabbatical has given me the opportunity to read, reflect, talk and visit with other principals on a topic that is seen as the crucial link to school improvement and student learning and achievement.

My thanks go to:
St Peter Chanel School Board of Trustees, who so willingly approved my application for this Sabbatical and support me in so many ways to carry out the complex task of leadership.

St Peter Chanel School staff, in particular Lesley who acted as principal for the term I was away, but also to everyone who supported Lesley.

Having the opportunity and time to learn from those who are identified as being 'champions' of quality practice helped me to make sense of the research on self-review and how it can be applied in my context. A big thanks to all those 'champion' principals, in particular Jennifer Horgan, Jacqui Duncan, Richard Newton, Catholic Principals in the Dunedin Diocese, as well as those who share their work on-line.

The Ministry of Education and NZEI for their commitment to providing principals with the opportunity to take time to re-group, reflect and regenerate.
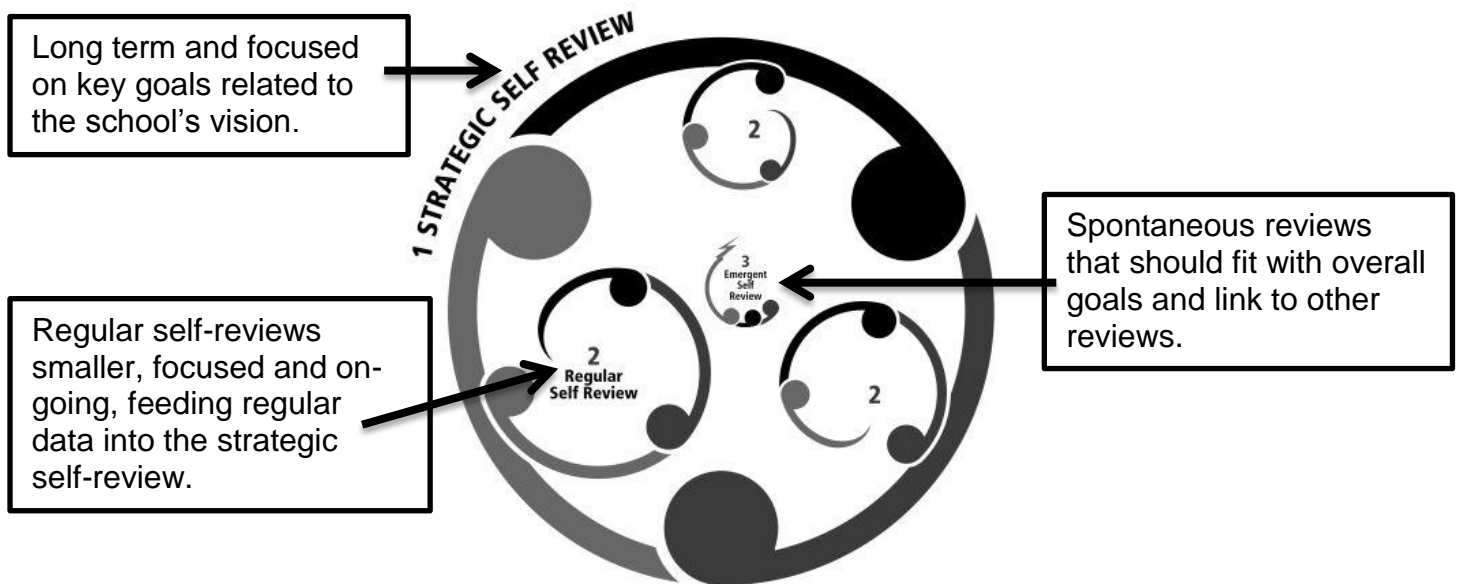
Methodology

This is not an academic paper but a collection of ideas that will be used to inform practice and provide a resource for future reflection. Some time was spent investigating current literature on self-review, what aspects of self-review have the greatest impact on student achievement and the importance of leadership in implementing review programmes. Although I read widely there were three key pieces of literature that became my main focus; *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration,* OECD *Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand*, and *ERO Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews 2011.*

My sabbatical inquiry involved identifying schools that have quality self-review programmes and meeting with them to learn from their practice. I did this through face to face meetings at schools, network meetings and a PD day on self-review that I organised. I also viewed school websites and the Educational Leaders website for further examples of good practice.
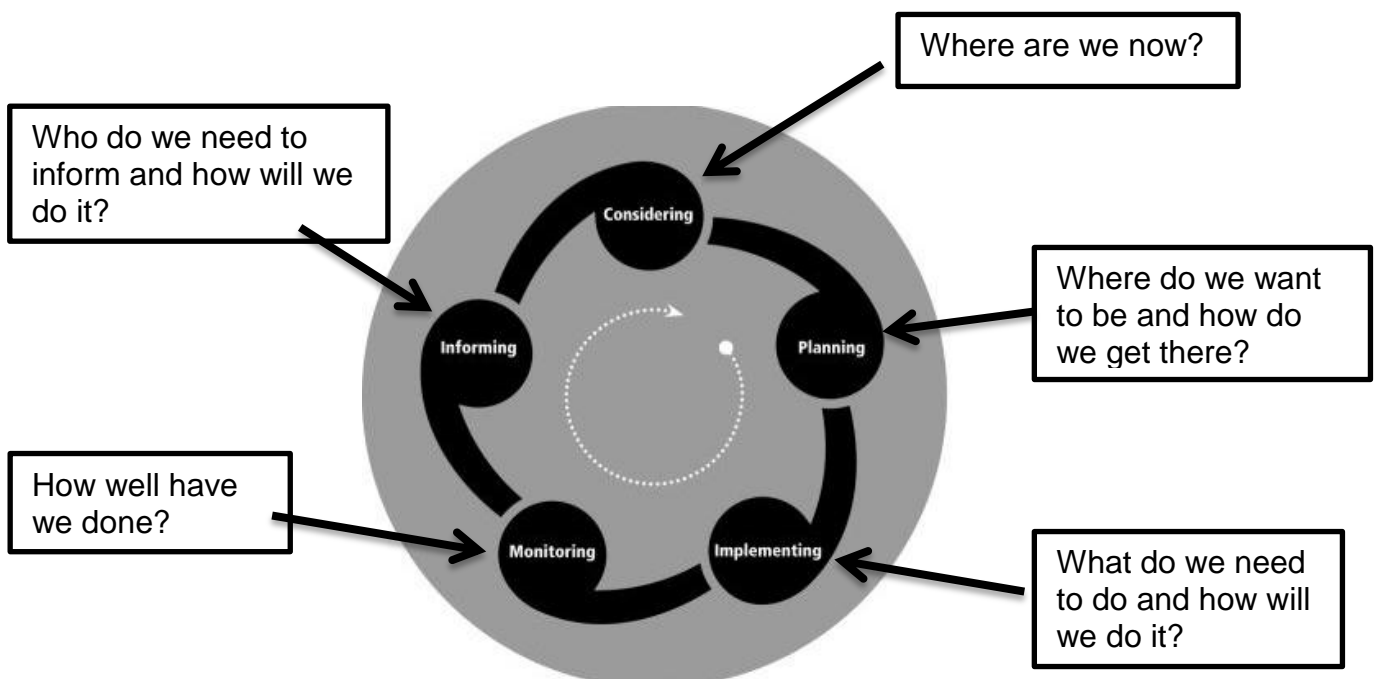
Self Review – What does it involve?

All schools are required to conduct their own self-review as it is the way schools keep focused on continuous improvement. It is the key mechanism through which schools and teachers gather and analyse information on the effectiveness of what they do and the progress they are making.

The Education Review Office identifies three main types of self-review:

Long term and focused on key goals related to the school's vision.

Regular self-reviews smaller, focused and on-going, feeding regular data into the strategic self-review.

Spontaneous reviews that should fit with overall goals and link to other reviews.

There is no prescribed way of undertaking self-review but the Education Review Office provide a framework of questions, prompts and indicators to assist schools. To ensure there is a focus on is on continuous improvement the process should be cyclical in nature:

Where are we now?

Who do we need to inform and how will we do it?

Where do we want to be and how do we get there?

How well have we done?

What do we need to do and how will we do it?

School self-review involves gathering data to produce information which is used as evidence to support judgements and make decisions about school direction and priorities.

1. Gathering raw or aggregated data – hard (quantitative/numerical) and soft (qualitative/narrative) that shows "what is" or "what is happening."

2. Turning data into information which is analysed to give meaning to the raw data allowing schools to make statements or comparisons.

3. Using the information as evidence to support judgements, to make decisions and to determine priorities.

This is considered to be the linchpin in establishing a continuous cycle of school and curriculum improvement (ERO).

Self Review – What is quality self-review?

Reading -   OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand

The *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: - New Zealand* provides an interesting perspective into self-review. They state that school self-review is at the core of quality assurance and improvement process and consider that we have gone the furthest among all the countries of the world towards a collaborative model of school evaluation. The OECD report believes that complementing internal review with external review adds an element of distance and provides the kind of perspective and challenge to assumptions which can lead to greater rigor in the approach. They believe the ERO approach to reviews recognises that while a school may perform well and have high levels of achievement, this is unlikely to be sustained without high quality self-review.

The OECD report raises some concerns about self-review that need to be considered:

- Some schools may struggle to collect and use assessment data effectively for improvement.
- There may be challenges for schools in knowing what data is pertinent and of the highest priority.
- School leadership needs stronger support for effective self-review.
- There are variations in Boards of Trustees capacity for effective self-review.

The indicator framework used by ERO to provide statements of what practice would look like in high performing schools is recognised by the report as playing a key role in ensuring that self-review and external review are aligned. However they caution that there is a danger that too elaborate a protocol may risk overwhelming schools with too much documentation and too many indicators. ERO have emphasised that schools may adapt, adjust, delete and amend indicators to suit the needs of the school.

The OECD review raises the issue that the annual report schools use to review their own progress receives little attention and no feedback from the Ministry of Education. They also believe that school's annual reporting is not well connected to other aspects of school evaluation.

Reading –ERO perspective

- Good quality self-review impacts significantly on student achievement.
- External review should focus on the quality of each school's own self review and approach to improvement, and its capacity for change.
- External review should complement and enhance the school's own self-review.
- Self-review should be informed by evidence which is used to monitor progress towards strategic goals, targets, teaching programmes and interventions, resources and quality of teaching, and how these link to learning.
- Self-review involves teachers reflecting on how what they are doing impacts on student engagement, learning and achievement, making changes based on relevant data or evidence and then evaluating outcomes.
- Planning and reporting required through the Education Act help establish a process of continuous improvement through a process of goal setting, monitoring progress and evidence driven self-review.
- Self-review can ascertain if a school has a safe and inclusive culture and identifies what is being done well and what needs to be improved.
- Self-review should also involve consulting with the school community to identify the extent of parent engagement and perceptions, as well as identify issues and barriers to inform policies, processes, programmes and practices.
- Self-review is most effective when it is lead from the top and is the process by which leaders can establish the quality and relevance of the school's policies, procedures, programmes and practices.
- Effective self-review should be embedded in everyday practice.
- Quality self-review can improve student outcomes and teacher performance.

Self Review – What does quality self-review look like in practice?

Reading – *System thinkers in Action*
Moving beyond the standards plateau – Michael Fullan.

In this article Fullan talks about a concept called 'System Thinkers in Action' which he believes is a requirement to change organisations and systems. He defines this as 'the presence and proliferation of practitioner leaders at all levels of the system who experience and base their thoughts and actions on larger parts of the system as a whole, thereby producing other leaders who think and act accordingly'.

In his writing Fullan identifies eight elements of sustainability that all leaders must address to enact systems of thinking in action. He states that it is not particular practices we need to sustain, but the capacity and process of continuous problem solving and improvement. One of these elements is 'Lateral Capacity' or deliberate

strategies where peers learn from each other, which is explained further by David Hargreaves.

Reading – *Working laterally – how innovation networks make an education epidemic* David H Hargreaves

Hargreaves believes the best way to spread new practices is on a peer to peer basis with people within the network recognised as 'champions' of the good/best practices. While he acknowledges that the sharing of 'good practice' and 'the dissemination of best practice' is widely advocated it is his belief we have limited knowledge of how to do this.

School Examples

Research shows us self-review has a strong impact on student achievement and identifies aspects that characterise quality self review. The hard question is the 'how'; how do we pull together all of those elements without becoming overwhelmed?

I would agree with the OECD report in their assertion that school leadership needs stronger support for effective self-review. What I found most valuable when thinking about how we achieve quality self-review was the opportunity to look at what other schools have done and talk to colleagues about what is important and what works.

Although there are many aspects to what constitutes a quality self-review there are three I have identified that are important to me in my context. The first two I will deal with here and the third I will investigate under my discussion on how leadership impacts on quality self-review.

1. Informed by Evidence

   The challenge may be, according to the OECD report, collecting pertinent data and ensuring it is used for improvement.

   Schools that I visited or reviewed all had data that was used to identify targets, many similar to what we currently do. One particular school that I visited generously shared their self-review data which was presented in a booklet. They had a systematic approach to the collection of data using a range of quality assessment tools such as asTTle, SEA, school designed assessments etc. I was particularly interested in how they collected information throughout the year and then presented that information in full to the Board, including longitudinal data, at the end of the year.

   Accompanying the data was a summary of the results along with recommendations for future improvement. Simply collecting the data is not sufficient without asking the important questions such as: what is the data telling us, why that might be, how valid is it and what does it mean for us.

   To me this appeared to be a good way of identifying strategic goals and targets for the following year.

This school also used their school management system effectively to collate and store assessment information. The way in which this was done meant evidence to support judgements was able to be accessed easily and the clear format would assist when making decisions about future direction and priorities.

Quality self-review also involves teacher inquiry, where data and evidence can, and should be used, to reflect on and inquire into how what they do impacts on student engagement, learning and achievement. Using the Teacher as Inquiry cycle, teachers can use evidence to give them increased knowledge about what works and make changes to improve the outcomes for students. Timperly et al (2007) in *Teacher Professional Learning and Development (BES)* found that for teachers to acquire the skills and habit of on-going inquiry into practice, they need to have the organisational conditions and support to do so.
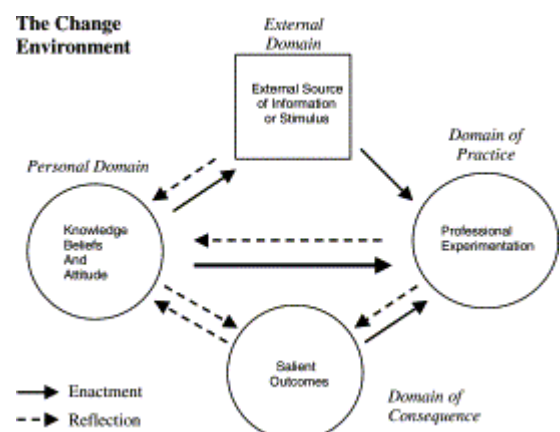
2. Planning for Self-Review

From my reading, observations and critique on what we do at our school I believe that there has to be a systematic approach to strategic and regular self-review and a monitoring of emergent reviews to ensure the focus remains on what has been identified as priority. This means that there needs to be clear documentation, based on evidence, about what will be done and how it will be done.

According to ERO, the planning and reporting required through the Education Act help establish a process of continuous improvement. However the OECD report identifies that these are not well connected to other aspects of school evaluation and there was no response on quality of charters to schools from the Ministry. It is good to see that they are responding to this report and now providing feedback to boards on charters and strategic planning.

Feedback prompted me to reflect more critically on our school charter and whether it was informed by self-review and an effective guiding document for teaching and learning. It also prompted me to look at what other schools (Glenholme, Beckenham, Ohope Beach, Te Pahu (on-line), St Joseph's Oamaru, St Joseph's Port Chalmers (network meeting), East Taieri and St Clair (on site) were doing, along with the examples provided by the Ministry.

Schools need to record how they will carry out their self-review. Mount Roskill Grammar School has a good self review model on their website based on the Clark-Peter Model of Professional Growth. They have taken this document and made sense of it in their context. They have also adapted the Teaching Inquiry Cycle model to meet the needs of their school.

During my sabbatical I also took the opportunity to look at different schools self-review planning. While each school was unique in their presentation and how they would implement their plans, there were also common features.

- o Schools considered all aspects of school review that needed to be reviewed and timetabled for that review to take place.
- o The key focus was on student achievement.
- o They were manageable.

Although there is no prescribed way of undertaking self-review, it would certainly help for schools, particularly those identified as having quality self-review processes, to share that good practice with others. While the OCED report cautions that there is a danger of overwhelming schools with too much documentation, I believe that sharing self-review documentation will assist schools in developing a systematic, effective approach to self-review.

Self Review – How does leadership impact on self review?

Reading - *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*

The aim of BES is to arrive at a theory of educational leadership that identifies where leaders should direct their energies, in order to gain the greatest leverage for enhancing student outcomes.

They found pedagogical leadership, leadership with a strong focus on involvement in teaching and learning, to have nearly four times the impact of transformational leadership.

The fact that there is a scarcity of evidence directly addressing the links between leadership and student outcomes was a challenge for the authors of BES. They used two strategies, forward mapping and backward mapping to overcome this limitation. Forward mapping involves starting with a measure of leadership and then tracing its links to student outcomes. Backward mapping starts with evidence about student outcomes, from which implications for school leadership are derived or inferred.

Using the forward mapping strategy 5 leadership dimensions, or broad set of leadership practices, were identified as having impact on student outcomes. These were:

1. Establishing goals and expectations.
2. Resourcing strategically.
3. Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum.
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development.
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Dimension 4 was found to have the most impact on student achievement, which suggests it is imperative for leaders to be actively involved with their teachers as the leading learners in their schools.

It was also found in high-achieving schools, or schools that are making major achievement gains, that:

- The principal makes student achievement the school's top goal.
- Leaders were more directly involved in curriculum design and implementation.
- Leaders are actively involved in discussions on how instruction impacts on student achievement.
- Leaders were more likely to do classroom observations and provide feedback.
- There was greater emphasis on systematic monitoring of progress and results were used to improve programmes.
- Leaders give greater emphasis to setting, communicating, monitoring, and reporting school goals, especially those that are related to student achievement.
- Leaders work directly with teachers to plan, co-ordinate and evaluate teachers and teaching.
- Leaders protected teachers from undue pressure from outside sources.
- Leaders establish a safe and supportive environment.

Using a backward mapping strategy three further dimensions were identified as having impact on student outcomes. These were:

1. Creating educationally powerful connections.
2. Engaging in constructive problem talk.
3. Selecting, developing and using smart tools.

Connections between individuals, organisations, and cultures can contribute to enhanced student achievement by ensuring a closer pedagogical and philosophical match between what happens at home and at school. BES also identified different types of school-home connections that can impact on student outcomes (joint interventions involving parents and teachers being the highest), but there were some that actually had a negative impact. This makes for interesting reading and could be an area for further investigation for our school.

'Engaging in constructive problem talk' is the ability to name, describe, and analyse problems in ways that reveal possibilities for change. To do this leaders need the ability to inquire into the theories behind the practices they wish to change.

The final dimension to discuss is the selecting, developing, and using smart tools. Spillane defines tools as "externalised representations of ideas that people use in their practice". It is important for leaders to ensure that any tools they introduce assist the users to achieve the intended purposes.

Four knowledge, skills and dispositions that make a difference to student outcomes and underpin the dimensions of effective leadership are identified. These are:
- Administrative decisions are informed by knowledge about effective pedagogy.
- Analyse and solve complex problems.
- Build relational trust.
- Engage in open-to-learning conversations.

<u>Reading</u> -   *Coaching leadership for school effectiveness and improvement*
         The 3 R's for coaching learning relationships   Jan Robertson

Jan Robinson believes that effective educational leadership is a collective, shared endeavour, focused on learning and achievement and respectful of the learner. She states we need leaders who are capable of:

– Building capacity and commitment to shared goals and vision;
– Building strong relationships, partnerships and alliances;
– Focusing on authentic education;
– Creating environments where students succeed;
– Understanding and leading the change process; and
– Finding new approaches of doing and being in their leadership practice.

Her model around the coaching of educational leadership is one where the coaching relationship develops as a partnership, with each person contributing to the learning and acquisition of new knowledge. The coach approaches the relationship as a learner and not 'all knower'.

In her research she identifies three important elements that need to be present for effective adult professional learning to take place;

1. Reciprocity
2. Relationship
3. Reflection-on-reality

and 10 principles as important underpinnings of an organisation based around these three elements.

1. Inquiry
2. Risk-taking and challenge
3. Responsibility and trust
4. Shared learning
5. Support
6. Building capacity
7. Quality
8. Innovation and improvement
9. Critical reflection, thinking and awareness
10. Belief

So what does this mean for me?

Firstly, I think my original question 'how does school leadership impact on self-review programmes', should have been 'how can effective leadership in self-review impact on learning and student achievement'. My inquiry has helped me identify the knowledge, skills and attributes I need to effectively manage and lead our self-review programme and ensure the best outcomes for students.

This leads to me to the third aspect to quality self-review that I consider is important to me in my context.
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3. Effective Leadership
   - Someone who knows what is important and can direct their energies to get the greatest gain in student outcomes.
   - Someone who makes student achievement the school's top goal.
   - Someone who is knowledgeable about effective pedagogy.
   - Someone who promotes and participates in teacher learning and development through the inquiry process.
   - Someone who can make connections that contribute to student achievement, particularly the school-home connection.
   - Someone who is able to build relational trust.
   - Someone who is able to engage in learning conversations.

Self Review – What next?

To develop a clear, well documented self-review process that is informed by evidence and research, focused on improving student achievement and teacher capability, sets a clear direction for our school and is embedded in everyday practice.

How?

- Ensure there are clear links between school charter, strategic plan, annual plan, and school review process.
- Make effective use of school management system for the collation of school-wide data and reporting.
- Ensure teachers have the organisational conditions and support to carry out *Teacher Inquiry* into practice that impacts on achievement.
- To build leadership capacity within the school by exploring models around the coaching concept.

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