

Principal's Sabbatical Report for Educational Leaders

Carol Coddington: Principal St Dominic's Catholic College Auckland

Sabbatical Period – June 10th – September 1st 2013

Introduction

I originally intended to take my sabbatical in 2012 but it was delayed to 2013 because of a major building programme at school.

The major part of my sabbatical centred on attendance at the **Leadership – An Evolving Vision (LEV)** course at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Boston. I had spoken to a number of colleagues over the last few years who recommended the course as one that was motivating and inspiring. I was also looking for professional development that would increase my capacity as a leader of learning and that would continue to inform our goal of continuing to improve the student achievement level and identify strategies to close the achievement gap for our priority learners.

An additional objective was to investigate the Dominican Charism and to look at strategies that would enable us as a Dominican Catholic school further incorporate aspects into the Special character goals of our college.

The Harvard Course

This course was week-long (including the weekend) academic course which comprised of morning and afternoon sessions and some evening sessions. The day sessions were in the main interactive lectures and at the end of the afternoon lectures we went into our small group tutorial sessions to reflect on the lectures and the challenges and opportunities that they presented to us as leaders.

The summaries of the key points of each lecture reflect what I found challenging and valuable and what I will hopefully be able to use in my leadership role at school.

Strategies in Action: Elizabeth City

“The purpose of public education is not to serve the public it is to create a public”. Thomas Jefferson

This was Elizabeth City's opening quote and it formed the basis of her session which focussed on defining strategy as a vision of actions that will achieve the vision of education for the students at your school. The strategy is the tool for achieving the vision through creating goals that are intentional road maps which is continually revisited and revised from both feedback and data that informs next steps.

Elizabeth City's argument for having a Strategic Plan is that if there is no plan then other agendas take over and unless everyone is focussed and pulls together then achievement becomes sustainable. She also argues that schools cannot handle more than three big initiatives at a time.

Her precept for why being strategic matters was that – it makes the most of the school's time, money and people and it creates a proactive rather than a reactive environment.

She encouraged us to use a meeting agenda that she provided and an impact chart that assists with evaluation of initiatives and likely outcomes for initiatives thus determining whether they are going to have a positive outcome for the school.

Overall Elizabeth City argued a positive case for Strategic Planning but also was realistic in terms of what can be achieved and the importance of planning a few initiatives well. She also argues that effective strategy planning will help improve student achievement.

Project Adventure Day

This was a day of team building exercises at an Outdoor Education Centre just outside of Boston.

The aim of the day was to work in your smaller group with your team leader in order to enable the team to bond into a cohesive unit. This was important as the teams were meeting each day to discuss the material from various presenters and it was important that we bonded as an effective team. Secondly it was also a day that allowed us as educational leaders to see the effectiveness of outdoor education in improving educational achievement. I gained the impression that Outdoor Education is not a normal part of the American education system, as New Zealanders we understand the value of outdoor education for our students.

Throughout the day we were faced with challenges involving choices as to whether we participated. The high ropes were probably the hardest choice and people chose to participate in this according to their comfort level.

This event was held on the second day so that we could learn more about our fellow team members approximately one quarter of the time was spent on group discussion and activity. For my group this was an effective way of getting to know each other and learning to work together and we were able to work off each other's strengths.

Project Adventure was an interesting experience it made me reflect on how we create teams in our schools and what do we do to help them bond together as a working unit.

Effective Use of During-the-Year Assessments: Kim Marshall

Kim Marshall argued that teacher teams analysing and following up on student learning results during the year is one of the most powerful ways to improve teaching and learning. He suggested that very few schools (in the United States) are using this strategy very effectively. In his workshop he looked at why this was happening and suggested some effective strategies.

These included using interim assessments which require teachers to teach a little and test a little on a regular basis. He says that if this is done properly it is a powerful means of identifying gaps in student's knowledge and the teacher is able to re-teach to address the gaps before moving on to the next part of the curriculum. He suggests that this take place every four to nine weeks based on the premis that:

- Initial teaching, no matter how good, cannot bring all students to proficiency because of differences in prior knowledge, attention and motivation.
- We should not wait until the end of the year to see who is confused that is obviously too late.
- The learning problem can be addressed before it gets bigger.

He asserts that interim assessment will lead the teacher to plan better, teach better, use 'in the moment' assessments and make powerful use of interim data to help close achievement gaps during the year.

For teachers this means they need to slow down, reflect on what is working well and what's not and use the assessment data for self-improvement.

The strategies that Kim Marshall suggests reinforce what John Hattie has shown to have the highest effect size in the classroom, that is, the positive impact of feedback and feed forward on improving student achievement.

Inclusive Education: Norman Kunc

Norman Kunc who suffers from cerebral palsy, challenged us with the precept that inclusive education is not something we "do " to students with disabilities, but involves a school making an intentional commitment to build and maintain a sense of belonging for all students and adults in the school. He maintains that our current emphasis on achievement, tracking and in some cases segregation leads most if not all students to see their membership in school and their "sense of belonging" as something that must be earned.

Kunc maintains that a central tenet of inclusive education is that belonging is an inherent need of all people and must not be reserved solely for the "best of us." Learning to value and work with a diversity of people is the first step in building an education system that fosters a sense of belonging among students and staff. Inclusive education may prove to be a vital catalyst in this process.

In applying these challenges to St Dominic's College I will be evaluating what we are doing to ensure that all students and staff have a sense of belonging to the school community. Even

though Kunc uses students with physical disabilities to make his case I think that his view incorporates all students who may feel disabled in other aspects of their lives.

Optimising Diversity: Universal Design for Learning: Thomas Hehir and David Rose

Rose and Hehir put forward the notion that modern technology is radically changing the sciences of teaching and learning. They say that on one hand new imaging technologies allow us to examine the roots of learning and individual differences in the human brain. On the other, new media technologies allow us to design tools for teaching and learning, tools that are flexible enough to meet the challenges of individual differences.

It is thus that we need to look at the student centred curriculum using the tools of Universal Design for Learning. This enables differentiation for each student in the classroom and the teacher is not teaching to the middle.

The use of UDL can fulfil the key requirements of student –centred curricula and it ensures that the means of learning are accessible for all students to succeed.

The key principles of UDL are that it:

- Provides multiple means of representation thus allowing the information to be presented to the learner in a variety of ways.
- Provides multiple means of action and expression and this enables the learner to choose how they will express what they know.
- Provides multiple ways of engagement which helps to ensure that learners with differing learning styles can become engaged in the learning.

Rose asserted that print is still the main method of communication in the classroom and that it does not suit all learners. In fact the US Congress has described this as the “print barrier” to learning.

However Rose also pointed out that the danger of poorly designed digital tools may give the illusion of progress when they are simply imitating the 16th century technology of print – we all know the phenomenon of “death by PowerPoint!”

Another factor to be taken into account when using the UDL approach is that of economic disparity that exists within the school and not all can have access to technology at home. Therefore it is important that the school has considered what needs to happen to ensure a level playing field for all students.

It is important, overall, to go back to the main purpose of education and to remember that quality teaching needs to be at the heart of all that we do.

Engaging in our Own Immunity to Change: Robert Keegan

This session addressed the issue of change and our natural resistance to change which is inbuilt in all of us. Keegan asks the questions – why is change so difficult, even when we are genuinely committed to it; how can we do a better job (regarding our own aspirations, and supporting

those of the people who work for us) closing the gap between what we intend and what are we actually bring about?

Keegan maintained that we are resistant to change because we have an inbuilt immunity system that works automatically to resist change. We have certain assumptions which drive our behaviours and we need to test our assumptions in order to effect change and prevent our immunity to change.

We need to look at the type of change we are trying to make and if it is technical change we may have to increase our skills and knowledge in order to accomplish the task.

We also face adaptive problems which require more than new skills and knowledge. These types of problems require us to seek transformational learning in order to solve a problem or make a change. It is an element of major change as it requires alteration in some of our basic, underlying beliefs and it requires transformational learning and problem solving.

Using Metrics to Guide Resource Decisions: James Honan

James Honan used a case study to highlight possible lessons and insights identified from a philanthropy's approach to grant making and performance assessment. He made specific links to this work in schools and school districts and drew comparisons to work by foundations and other funding agencies.

The case study in point was the Annie E Casey Foundation which in 2002 adopted a results based accountability (RBA) framework to track and report on the results of their philanthropic investments. The RBA programme was piloted in a number of areas including the K-12 education programme.

Grantees were highly involved in an iterative process to determine appropriate measures, refine the theory of change, and how to track progress.

The aim of the RBA programme was to enable staff to get a sense of how grantees were doing and therefore how the way the foundation that hadn't been possible before.

The K-12 programme got a much clearer sense of what it wanted to achieve in its programme area and a deeper understanding of how individual grantee work contributed to the foundation's overall goals.

One of the key messages of this case study was not only the importance of having an evaluative framework that enabled the foundation to measure the work of the grantees in terms of academic achievement but also the importance of the grantee's involvement, accepting that every goal will not be achieved and the importance of a communication strategy.

In setting up the performance measures for grantees the Foundation staff worked extensively with each grantee to determine which handful of key measures would really give them insight into what they were achieving and what they might need to improve on.

The foundation had three broad performance questions, specific reporting guidelines with specific performance measures. The grantees were able to augment the numerical performance measures with other additional measures.

Lessons learned from the case study were:

- Start with results and work backwards; clearly articulate your vision of a core result and your strategy for achieving it before starting to create your results measurement framework.
- You must have broad institutional support at your foundation if you want to implement and design a successful RBA effort. Strong leadership at senior and board level is crucial.
- Relationships with grantees and understanding their local context matter when creating a tool that works for both parties. Trust of each party is important it helps to anchor the results process in reality and encourages compliance.
- Including grantees in the process requires special skills. Interaction on the grantees 'turf' was important and coaching of the grantees was also very important.
- Sustaining a results programme is not natural and includes the need to build capacity.
- Not all investments achieve every type of result – a limited financial investment affects the impact and does not achieve necessarily result in a major impact.
- A communication result is more than numbers.
- A learning agenda is an essential component of a successful results framework.

In summary a lot of what happened in the case study has relevance to New Zealand's current results driven education environment. In particular National Standards which was imposed, in particular, from the top down would not win many "brownie points" when measured against this case study. The implementation, lack of consultation and involvement of teachers and senior leaders does not meet the criteria set out by the Annie Casey Foundation case study.

This case study also highlighted the importance of using data in a systematically and strategically by involving all staff to improve student achievement.

Social Perspective Taking: Hunter Gehlbach

In this presentation Gehlbach argues the importance of educational leaders being able to accurately understand others with whom we engage by closely observing them in order to have a better understanding of how they behave.

All members of the school community need to better understand how people behave in order to understand them better. Through a better understanding of behaviours leaders can make effective interventions which will lead to improved student achievement. An example that he used was that of the teacher who labels a class as low achievers and doesn't then look for any behaviour that would lead them to a contrary opinion. Similarly the student who believes that they know which information is important and valuable who then prepare for an assessment and

do not achieve them may not accept that their perception of what was needed for the assessment was wrong because of pride.

He went on to state that positive student/teacher relationships are important, as we know from the work of the Te Kotahitanga programme and it is through a positive relationship students develop the competencies of attention, motivation, problem-solving and self-esteem.

Much of Gehlbach's presentation confirmed the importance of positive relationships and all that that entails in the classroom in order to enhance student achievement.

Cultural Leadership for Transforming School Organisations: Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell

Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell was an outstanding presenter who was passionate about the importance of a positive school culture to improve student achievement.

She presented us with the notion that culture is often viewed as the key factor in a school's success. She went on to say that the idea of culture can be abstract and the puzzle of shaping culture can seem impenetrable.

The session focussed on helping us to understand the cognitive, behavioural, social and tangible underpinnings of organisational culture. It was explained that organisational culture tends to be unique to a particular organisation and it is composed of an objective and subjective dimension and concerned with custom, tradition and shared beliefs about organisational life. It is a powerful determinant of individual and group behaviour, it affects virtually all aspects of organisational life from the ways in which people interact with each other, perform their work and dress to the type of decisions made in the organisation, its organisational policies and procedures and strategy considerations.

Technology and Today's School of the Future: How to prepare for Tomorrow: Barry Fishman

Barry Fishman's key message was that teaching has three basic components; students, teachers and content; technology is a tool which enables teachers to deliver knowledge systematically.

The failures that come about when using technology in teaching are:

- Confusing technology for content- it needs to be integrated with regular teaching and learning activities.
- Failing to consider the real context of teaching and learning in a school. We need to consider how the technology is going to be used in teaching – you may not need the latest PC etc.,
- When the assessment is not matched to the goals of innovation for example when increased achievement is expected but all that was happening was increasing the network.
- Expecting that if the equipment is provided people will come and use it, he used the example of the first video conferencing in 1927 in the Bell Telephone laboratories and it never took off until after 9/11 when travel became too difficult.
- When the activity and the technology are mismatched.

- There is only one type of technology used to deliver all learning the failure to match the activity to the context it is presented in e.g. “death by power point”

The challenges that come with the increased use of technology in the education system were highlighted by the US Department of Education in its National Technology Plan. These challenges are as relevant to New Zealand as they are to the United States.

The 2010 U.S. National Education Plan Technology Plan outlines five focus areas when considering the use of technology in teaching:

- **Learning Engage and Empower** – students are always at the centre of learning, they need to be able to interpret the material in a way that mirrors daily lives which allows them to have access to participate through media/technology to learn new things, collaborate and share ideas with people beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom. The challenge is create engaging, relevant and personalised learning experiences for all students that mirror students ‘ daily lives and the reality of their futures. Technology should be used to leverage to provide access to more learning resources than are available in the classroom, and connections to a wider set of “educators” including teachers, parents, experts and mentors outside the classroom. Students should have the opportunity use “real world” tools to grapple with “real world” problems.
- **Assessment: Measure what Matters** – the model of learning described above requires new and better ways to measure what matters, diagnose strengths and weaknesses in the course of learning when there is still time to improve student achievement and involve multiple stakeholders in the process of designing, conducting and using assessment. The use of technology based assessment, such as easTTle or the Khan Academy, can provide data to drive decisions on the basis of which is best for each and every student and this in turn NEPT maintains will lead to continuous improvement and the achievement of the Obama administration that 60% of the population will gain two or four year degrees by 2020 and that the achievement gap will be closed ensuring that all students will graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers.
- **Teaching: Prepare and Connect** - the goal here is to support all professional educators both individually and in teams with technology that will connect them to data, content, resources, expertise and learning experience that will enable and inspire more effective teaching for all learners. Technology is seen as the tool for education teachers and enabling them to have access to the best professional learning.
- **Infrastructure: Access and enable** – the precept in this to ensure that all educators and students have access to a comprehensive structure for learning both in and out of school. This requires adequate broadband width and adequate wireless connectivity at all times. Also all learners and educators will need to have at least on internet device with the appropriate

software and resources to ensure 24/7 access thus leading to improved student achievement outcomes

- **Productivity: Redesign and Transform** – given that technology has the power to enhance student achievement it means that the current archaic educational system will need to redesign processes and structures to take advantage of the technology to improve learning outcomes whilst making more efficient use of time, money and staff.

Given these challenges and setting them against our own educational landscape it is obvious that the following questions must be asked – how will the technology be paid for with all the demands already in the curriculum, how will teachers be upskilled to a sufficient standard to ensure that technology is integrated into day to day teaching as a tool that leads to improved students outcomes and it does not just become another didactic teaching tool with a few more bell and whistles?

Whilst acknowledging that technology is a valuable tool for instruction ... it must also be acknowledged that successful teaching is never about the technology and the changing contexts and challenges of work and life in the 21st century call for new approaches to learning and therefore new approaches to teaching and therefore new thinking about school organisation.

Supporting Beginning Teachers in Instruction: Katherine Merseth

This presentation used a case study to highlight the need for support for beginning teachers and how a school's culture determines the amount and type of support that a beginning teacher receives in the American education system. I felt that our Beginning teacher programme and the expectation that all beginning teachers are part of it helps to induct teachers into teaching. There was no mention of a national or state wide programme for beginning teachers both in mentoring, coaching or time in the case study.

Reflections from the course and Next Steps:

The course was thought provoking and the academic challenges were stimulating as we are often in the busyness of principalship dealing with the here and now rather than having time to reflect, research and apply our thinking to those challenges in our schools we tend to chip away at them in small chunks.

I enjoyed the fact that the course was focussed on raising student achievement and the importance of each individual student's view point. The focus on the potential of technology as a means to an end by ensuring that the curriculum becomes more student-centred and meets the individual needs of the student was important to me. This reflects the current thinking in New Zealand about student-centred leadership which is the subject of Vivianne Robinsons' book of the same name. Similarly the place of technology and the quality of the teacher in raising student achievement was a common theme throughout the presentations.

Also, the emphasis on knowing what is actually happening in the classroom on a daily basis was emphasised as being fundamental to ensure that the goals of improving student achievement are met. This again emphasised the need for quality teachers who are reflective, who ensure that

students have access to opportunities for success and who are willing to build a relationship with their students in order to ensure that their students learning needs are being met.

The course also made it clear that teaching is no longer a solitary occupation, for years teachers have been able to close their doors and there has been little interference as long as they got the “job” done. It is no longer autonomous it requires that the teacher collaborates in planning, assessing and moderating. In working as a team that has overall strategic goals that are common for all teachers become more collegial and reflective. Our need to work together in NCEA and consider common data such as asTTle looking at how data informs and leads us to the next steps helps to ensure that our teachers have become more collaborative and reflective in their roles.

The reminder that that the current Western schooling is still largely based on the industrial era model and that this does not meet the learning demands of 21st century learners was a valid challenge to all of us attending the course. The need for the principal to be the educational leader was emphasised throughout the course and the fact that we are responsible for improvements in student achievement through our leadership and administrative organisation was highlighted frequently.

The challenge for us is to improve on the current model and to lead our schools into a student centred education model through transformational change is not an easy task but a necessary one.

Challenges:

The challenges that are presented to us as we make the transformational changes that will ensure our school curriculums and systems support a 21st century student centred education need to be considered and the barriers need to be factored into the transformational change strategy.

Resourcing:

In order to access the technology and ensure a level playing field for all will require the support and monetary input of the government and Ministry of Education. Boards of Trustees also need to be made aware of the importance of technology as tool in education. Following from that is the need to upskill teachers so that they have a thorough understanding and the confidence to use technology as a tool in the classroom. Also the changed pedagogy of teaching needs to be addressed for current staff and those at the beginning of their career.

Organisation of the School structure:

There needs to be a re-think of the traditional structure of the school day and the timetable – if students are able to access school at any time through technology does the current industrial model still fit the needs of 21st century learners? I think that many secondary schools are further behind in their approach than primary schools.

A change of cultural organisation needs to be carefully planned and thought through.

Importance of Teacher Quality:

We require teachers who have the ability to use the new technologies to improve student achievement and also are aware of the importance of the student/teacher relationship and its importance in determining student outcomes and achievement.

Dominican Charism

The second part of my sabbatical was centred on the Dominican Charism and to this end I visited Sr Margaret Mayce OP at the United Nations and Margaret O'Shea Charism co-ordinator for Dominican schools in Australia.

United Nations:

Sr Margaret Mayce OP is a member representing the Dominican Sister on the UN NGO Climate Change committee. I visited her to find out what part the Sisters played with this group and how their work was related to the overall charism and fundamental beliefs of our Catholic faith. I also wished to be able to bring this knowledge back to be shared with the school and wider community.

It was humbling to consider what the NGO attempts to achieve in terms of being a watchdog and also an awareness raising agent for us against the member nations of the UN.

As a result of spending time with Sr Margaret I am hoping to bring her out to New Zealand to work with both our student community and staff on the this important issue.

Margaret O'Shea Dominican Charism Co-ordinator

My time spent at Santa Sabina in Sydney was extremely worthwhile. I spent time discussing resources that are available for our teachers to be able to have a deeper understanding of our Dominican Heritage and also the feasibility of developing a Strategic Professional Plan that will enhance and strengthen the Special Character of our College.

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank the St Dominic's Board of Trustees for their support of my application and the financial support that they made available for my professional development. I also wish to acknowledge the extra work that my absence entailed for Elizabeth Hill who was Acting Principal in my absence; I thank her for her leadership and commitment. I thank and acknowledge Laura Friend who took on extra responsibilities in the Pastoral Care portfolio. I also thank and acknowledge the rest of the Senior Leadership Team who were called upon in my absence.

Thank you to the Ministry of Education for awarding me Sabbatical Leave, it was an exciting time, it gave time to reflect and also to learn and bring back to the college some worthwhile knowledge that will ultimately benefit the learning of the whole college community.