



Principal's Sabbatical Report 2012

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Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical was to:

- Progress the research component of my doctoral thesis and allow me time to start analyzing my data
- Visit schools which have embedded the practices of leadership development which I have been investigating through my doctoral research
- Visit schools which are using e-learning effectively to deliver curriculum to students
- Visit schools using the principles of DDDM to enhance teaching and learning outcomes
- Attend the Global Christian Schools' Network Conference St Legier
- Present a paper at the CCEAM Conference Cyprus
- A period of refreshment and reflection

School Visits

Over a period of nine weeks in Term 4 2012 I visited 10 schools in the UK and Europe. My intention had been to also visit schools in Canada, particularly those which were developing e-learning communities but this proved to be very difficult to arrange as the programmes being developed were in their elementary stages and there was not much to be gained by visiting the schools. Alternatively, I spent time with the Director of CIS elearning Consortium which also has links with iNACOL (International Association for K-12 Online Learning).

In the UK I visited seven academies, all of which were considered to be schools performing highly and rated as OUTSTANDING or GOOD by Ofsted. I visited three schools in Europe, which were interesting but not really beneficial in furthering the aims of my sabbatical.

Doctoral Study

My sabbatical leave was preceded by four years of interest and study around leadership development and best practice. The publication of the synthesis of best evidence leadership literature (BES) highlights the importance of identifying the contexts and conditions that are more conducive to learning-centred leadership practices in schools. My research to date has shown that the time has come for all schools to have a more strategic focus on intentional leadership development and succession planning before a vacancy occurs and a replacement needs to be in place. Andy Hargreaves, well known for his work on sustainability in leadership, notes that leadership succession events are rarely treated with indifference – they are crucial to the ongoing success of the school. In many schools, however, leadership succession is not an episodic event or an unexpected exception. It is a regular and recurring part of the life of the school. My doctoral research investigates the elements of best practice in schools around succession planning and leadership development that will ensure continuity of student success and maintenance of vision and culture through the process of a change of principal.

Strong leadership is a cornerstone of success for a school. Succession planning and talent development is about encouraging everyone to see themselves as part of the leadership strategy that focuses on attracting and developing passionate and skilled leaders who can effectively support student achievement and well-being. The challenge of school leadership succession and supply is a pressing reality for many western countries. As identified by Brooking (2008) and MacPherson (2009), in New Zealand there is a looming crisis over both supply and quality of future leaders. Age demographics in the New Zealand education workforce require substantial numbers to fill leadership roles from 2010 when 'Baby Boomers' will accelerate their retirement. Effective succession strategies would help ensure ongoing professional development, organizational learning and systemic capacity building. Boards of Trustees need to take a long term leadership approach to succession planning that starts at the teacher level. Leaders are powerful motivators for improvement. An organization's most effective leaders are not just acquired, they are grown. Having strong leaders throughout the school results in an improvement and achievement driven culture.

There are issues around the supply and demand of principals in NZ (Brooking 2007). Leadership succession is of strategic importance. Being a principal of any school in the 21st century is a complex and demanding role. Due to this complexity, principal succession issues relate not only to attracting and appointing suitable applicants but ensuring they will be supported in their development as leaders within

their role. Therefore, in addition to the problem of finding capable and willing applicants to fill principal vacancies and support them once appointed, it is necessary for Boards and senior management teams to acknowledge the importance of building leadership capacity within schools. Such conversations should relate to not only having suitably qualified people willing to take up the challenge of leading a school but also to the types of leadership skills are required for 21st century schools.

Kiwi Leadership for Principals (MOE 2008) also recognizes that the principal has a key role in guiding and supporting others to step up as leaders by recognizing and developing the leadership potential of teachers in different areas and levels of the school and creating opportunities for leadership skills to be developed by teachers, students and other members of the school community in order to strengthen a school wide commitment to achieving the agreed outcomes. This is important not only for building positive relationships but for growing and sustaining the school's leadership capacity.

Leadership succession planning and talent development is an ongoing, contextual, orderly yet innovative process. It is important to get the right people, including attracting and developing leaders who reflect a school's diversity, in order to recognise and develop their leadership potential long before a vacancy needs to be filled. Leadership talent development takes place over the cycle of an entire career and in all roles at both the school and the system level. In an article written as part of my doctoral studies (Passing the baton – Leadership succession in schools, ACEL Leading and Managing Vol 17 Number 1 Autumn/Winter 2011), I reflect on the types of issues important to a school namely the significance of supporting and developing leadership potential, particularly as it relates to successful leadership succession. When leadership changes, it is important for the new leader to be sensitive to the special character and aspirations of the school, to be able to build on past successes and continue existing school improvement processes – ensuring a continuity of purpose. By recognizing and fostering leadership potential, and actively building leadership capacity in the daily life of the school, a change of principal is planned and prepared for– continuity is a focus and the vision is not lost.

In meeting with school leaders at the schools I visited, it quickly became obvious that succession planning is not generally a key element in the strategic plan of the school. Most leaders say they have occasionally thought about it but no definitive or purposeful action has been taken. I found this surprising in the schools in the UK as the National College of School Leadership has been prolific in the publication of key documents related to succession planning in schools. I had the opportunity to visit the NCSL in

Nottingham during this sabbatical and I was impressed by the quality of the publications and the amount of support available to school leaders which related to succession planning. Some examples are:

Retaining head teachers: Succession planning
Succession planning: Key themes for school governors
Leadership succession: An overview. Securing the next generation of school leaders
Recruiting head teachers and senior leaders: Succession planning
What we are learning about effective solutions to support succession planning
What are we learning about recruiting leaders for faith schools
Greenhouse schools: Lessons from schools that grow their own leaders
Enchanted head teachers: Sustainability in primary school headship
Growing tomorrow's school leaders: The challenge
Review of the landscape: Leadership and leadership development 2008
Distributed leadership
Meeting the challenge: Growing tomorrow's school leaders

These can be viewed on the website (now named National College for Teaching and Leadership www.nationalcollege.org.uk)

As a part of this sabbatical journey I wanted to be able to look at schools which have been successful in implementing succession planning as a strategic element of their governance and management and provide some sensible and practical strategies for schools to consider in preparation for succession planning. The outcome of my investigation into the place of succession planning in these schools reinforced the findings of my earlier research and case studies in New Zealand; namely that it is not seen as a high priority in strategic planning for the future in schools.

Data Driven Decision Making (DDDM)

Over the past few years there has been evidence of increased emphasis by the MOE on leadership and assessment through the investigation of DDDM (Data Driven Decision Making) in education. This refers to teachers, principals and administrators systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data, including input, process, outcome and satisfaction data, to guide a range of decisions to help improve the

success of students and schools. During my sabbatical I was keen to visit schools where DDDM is used extensively and investigate how to make better use of the SMS in order to improve the conditions for enhanced and better informed teaching and learning.

UK Schools and the use of data

I became very interested in the use of data to support learning following a presentation made by John Hattie, University of Auckland early in 2005. This can be accessed at

<http://research.acer.edu.au/do/search/?q=hattie&start=0&context=473745>

During my sabbatical I was keen to visit schools to see how they used data to inform teaching and learning practice. I visited seven schools in England. Six schools were secondary and one was a primary school. Two were located in Worcestershire and the other five were in the Newcastle on Tyne region. Schools in England and Wales use the data system, run by the Fischer Family Trust, in target – setting decisions. The Fischer Family Trust (FFT) is based in South Wales and provides data and analyses to all schools and local authorities through FFT, a company established in 2001 with direct links to the Fischer Family Trust. The estimates are used by teachers to inform the setting of ambitious and aspirational targets for students. The data helps Head Teachers, and senior leaders to evaluate past performance, estimate future performance and set challenging targets.

There were very mixed responses to my queries re the use of data to inform practice. Changes had just been introduced by Ofsted (similar to ERO). Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills. They report directly to Parliament and are independent and impartial. They inspect and regulate services which care for children and young people and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. The changes involved full school inspections with less than 24 hours’ notice and a change to the criteria for measuring the effectiveness of the school based on the performance of the students. The categories for effectiveness are: OUTSTANDING, GOOD, REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT, SERIOUS MEASURES REQUIRED. All Head Teachers and Senior Leaders with whom I met expressed concern about the new regulations and this is, in turn, governed all our discussions around the use of data. There was also a considerable amount of tension around the Ofsted grades. Schools visited which had an OUTSTANDING rating already were charged with demonstrating how they were going to continue to drive up performance while schools on a GOOD rating were constantly evaluating their data against national data to ensure that they could demonstrate improvement for their next review.

The results of the testing at the three review ages for students (6 years, 11 years and 14 years) determined the estimates for improvement by the next testing age bracket.

The FFT estimate is a starting point for determining what level or grade a pupil might attain in the future. The FFT estimates provided to schools show both estimated levels and grades for specific subjects as well as the 'chance' or likelihood of achieving a range of results. Estimates were to be used as a starting point to support realistic, aspirational target setting. Schools were required to also use a range of other data, professional knowledge and discussions with pupils and parents when setting targets. The estimates were provided to say 'if what happened in tests and examinations last year was mirrored this year, these are the most likely outcomes.' Schools were required to set individual targets based on a whole range of information - including a pupil's personal circumstances, their teacher's knowledge of them, their performance in school tests, their own aspirations and the support they've received at home. FFT estimates are only one element of this. Targets were also to be challenging and aspirational.

I found the system to be both challenging and discouraging. It appeared from all discussions with leaders in the seven schools in the UK that no one enjoyed this form of assessment and data driven accountability as teaching was very much targeted to the test and to ensuring that students reached or exceeded the estimates recorded. In one secondary school a huge banner was erected at the entrance, heralding the fact that this school had achieved in the top 12% of all secondary schools for Year 12 in the previous school year. Inside the school, attached to multiple walls, were charts placing students according to their results. Not only were the students categorised according to their success or failure but their photos were also attached. On querying the lack of privacy for the students and the humiliation for those considered to be failing, the Head Teacher saw nothing detrimental in this and hoped it encouraged all students to do better in the future!

Teacher performance was also evaluated according to the data produced by FFT. In two schools class lists sighted had students who had failed to reach their targets highlighted in red. If there were more than 2 students in a class highlighted then the teacher was also considered to have failed to reach the required targets/estimates and appropriate measures were taken to remedy the situation. All this data was also available to Ofsted so there was considerable pressure to ensure that estimates were met and that school's targets ensured success for as many students as possible.

In the schools I visited and based on the evidence I gathered, the heavy focus on the FFT data system did not allow for much in the way of teacher judgement or experimentation with various types of assessment. Many teachers expressed concern and regret that they felt they couldn't be more innovative in their course design or curriculum content. Head Teachers and senior leaders were similarly concerned that the emphasis on the data results and the impact of failing to meet estimates for the students within their schools had taken much of the joy and pleasure from the roles they held.

One thing that was quite evident in all the schools visited was the fact that the majority of teachers were data literate. A data driven culture requires teachers to have a range of skills to support data driven decision making. These skills include collecting and compiling data, analysing data and learning how to apply data to planning and curriculum development. The trend towards DDDM will most likely continue and it will be important for staff to be supported through PD programmes that enable them to know how to identify, analyse and apply data to teaching and learning.

E-learning

During my sabbatical I also wanted to look at the ways various schools are using technology in e-learning programmes. This is an area that we have been exploring as a school and the opportunity to see some schools which had been following this pathway for a few years was of interest. Unfortunately I was not able to find any schools that felt competent enough to share their journey at this stage as so many were new into the elearning field. In all the schools I visited in the UK, none had yet ventured into any form of elearning experiences.

However, I was fortunate to be able to spend time with the Director of eLearning for the CIS elearning Consortium in Canada. As Principal of a school using elearning for senior students through classes provided via video conferencing as part of the FarNet cluster group, I was keen to learn of various programmes and strategies to enhance this method of learning. CIS is a consortium of 16 schools which began in 2008 and aims to provide an enhanced online experience for students in Grades 6 – 12 across Canada. A wide range of online courses enabled students to obtain qualifications in subjects not offered through their school – in much the same way as it happens in NZ. There were some interesting courses on offer but the manner of delivery and the desire for students to develop 21st Century skills through the use of technology did not differ from my experience with the use of elearning at my school.

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