

Report on Sabbatical : T3 2012.

By Ross Preece: Principal @ Whangamata Area School.

The sabbatical was used in 2 distinct parts. A university paper and a road trip to visit a variety of schools.

Part A. This consisted of the foundation paper of Educational Leadership and Management at Unitech. It required a weeks worth of lectures in the holidays and this was followed by two 5000 word essays. The lectures were interesting and it was a challenge to take on board so much material during the week. I found the quality of lectures variable but enjoyed the week. Of the 25 people on the course about 1/3 were polytech tutors undertaking further qualifications to give them an academic grounding. The other 2/3 were aspiring Principals (ie syndicate leaders, DP's or AP's). I was the only Principal on the course. After the block course you were required to write 2 essays. For both of these there was a book of readings provided plus you had access to the Unitech library with all of its online material. The 1st essay required you to review a variety of material on educational leadership and management. The 2nd essay was similar but had a specific focus on leadership by ethnic minorities. I found the daily discipline of spending 8hrs per day either reading or writing a refreshing change, especially because working from home meant you were uninterrupted. It was great to have plenty of think time and consider how the concepts presented might apply to your school and or your leadership.

Overall I was pleased with the first part of the sabbatical but there were 2 frustrations that I had which will mean I am unlikely to do the other paper required to complete the certificate. The first frustration was associated with the nature of the task ie a literature review. The task required you to only review the literature and as an actual leader I constantly had to resist the temptation to put in my thoughts of how it worked in a real school setting. The restrictions of literature review really started to 'rankle' by the end of the second essay. The second frustration was more of a personal nature. I have already completed an honours degree in Journalism at Canterbury. The Unitech promotional material suggested that recognition would be granted for 'prior learning'. There was to be no recognition given for my 7 years as a principal (I partially understand this!) and also no recognition for my honours degree. The reason being, that it was completed 15 years ago and thus wouldn't be recognised. I find this both a frustration and insulting. (I suggested the course leader may feel the same if in 15 years time he was told that his recently completed PHD was no longer recognised). My advice to any Principal, with postgrad qualifications, considering studying at Unitech is to negotiate any 'prior learning' before enrolling in any course.

Part B: A road trip around the top of the South Island to visit a variety of schools. These visits were scheduled in advance with a goal of visiting 2 schools per day. The project was to visit small secondary schools or large Area schools in non-polytech towns to investigate how the schools are providing for their non –academic students particularly for those who may have already gained L2. There were 2 reasons for this particular focus: 1) This is the profile of my school. 2) It is the same issue being faced by every school in the country.

I pre booked my visits either with the curriculum or gateway leader or with the Principal. (I also provided them with a 2 page outline of 3 strategies we have in place to meet the needs of that Target group, see attached). All the schools visited were willing to share their strategies and were

very interested in finding out about other schools. Overall there was plenty of innovation and 'hybrid vigour' and also a level of frustration about the lack of leadership from MOE in this regard.

What follows is a brief outline of the key initiatives within the school and if you want more detail you should contact the schools directly.

Amuri Area school based in Culverden about a 1.5 hour drive from CHCH. They had 2 innovations to meet this need. They had **completely restructured their timetable for years 11-13**. This allowed for 3 lines to have 4 hour blocks and another 2 lines to have 2 X 2 hour blocks. This enabled subjects such as art, trade, outdoor ed to have virtually whole days to work on projects. This also gave the opportunity for students to visit CHCH polytech on a regular day without impact on their other subjects. The staff have voted overwhelmingly to retain this model because it allows blocks of time. (An accidental finding is that student absence has decreased because students know that a day away can mean 4 missed lessons).

The school made a van available to a parent 'volunteer' who would drive the van once a week to CHCH to take students to polytech. The parents knew that once per term a member of their family would be driving the van and undertaking a days shopping. This meant that staffing was saved in terms of one line, engaged with no staffing cost. The students doing pathways in CHCH were engaged and numbers will grow in 2013.

Kaikoura High a 2 hour drive from CHCH. They had a small group (7?) students doing similar pathways type courses in CHCH. Because of the distance involved the students and a parent would go for two days and stay over night. They look to have their students involved with the local tourism industry which is very strong and has many connections to local iwi. They were in negotiations with Polytechs in ChCh and Blenheim to see if it was possible to establish an outreach branch in their town. The school would make facilities available in trade and hospitality. There was strong support for this concept from the careers/ gateway co-ordinators.

Queen Charlotte College has long standing links with the local aquiculture industry particularly the local mussel farms. They have had students on Gateway placements working on the farms. (The businesses have demonstrated their appreciation by gifting the school 'lines' of mussels this brings considerable benefit to the school). Whilst gateway placements tend to suit non-academic students the school has also established connections with water quality and breeding institutes for the science / biology students. This enables students to have real context. The school also offers Marine Studies complete with Padi dive courses. The Principal is very clear about steering his students away from the tourism / hospitality pathway (Picton has a booming tourism trade) because nearly all positions within these industries tend to be minimum wage. The students, parents and township have a sense of pride in where the school is heading and the school has created a 'win-win' for students and themselves.

Rai Valley Area School. This is 40 minutes from Blenheim and has a total roll of less than 100. They had only 13 students in years 11-13. They had a gem available to all their students via their home economics teacher. (1 day a week he teaches at the school the rest of the week he is the local butcher). All the senior students gained ten L2/L3 credits via 'small goods production'. Over two days they produce their own sausages and salami (using meat from the local farms or hills). The students start at 6 am for 2 consecutive days and are back at school by 10am with their book work done. All

13 of the senior students will gain these 10 credits, one person each fortnight to minimise impact on the butchers business. A truly innovative approach, from a tiny town.

Waimea College. A large school of 1600 about 20 minutes by bus from Nelson Polytech. The gateway programme is large with over 100 students registered. The school is accessing the pathways type courses in Nelson for the majority of these. There is a special bus provided to transport the students to and from town. The popularity of these courses and the positive spin-off for the pupils back at school means that there will be 2 bus loads next year. Most of the local high schools are accessing pathways, all on the same day.

Motueka High. A school with a roll of about 600 and 45 minutes from Nelson. There was a strong push to meet the needs of non academic students because they are the majority within the school. There were courses provided in a range of hands on options including furniture making. They had also constructed a Primary Industry Trades Academy (Pita) which made use of local industries namely, horticulture, fishing, dairy and forestry. Again the students involved in these courses benefitted because of real world learning and increased self esteem. They also had a group of students going into Nelson Polytech for Pathways type courses.

Tapawera Area School. A small school of about 250 pupils an hours drive from Nelson. They also had a van load of students going to Nelson each week. Their innovation was in terms of timetabling with many classes running as multi level particularly in years 11-13. The school had the philosophy that what-ever course the student wished to undertake they would make it fit. This system had been in place for 3 years and had helped the school retain their senior student's post 16. Staff applying for jobs at the school were made aware of this philosophy. It also enabled students to create multi-level courses which suited their ability levels.

Buller High school. A school of about 500 pupils and the school made use of the local Polytech branch in their town. Their gateway programmes placed students in real work placements in the local mining, forestry and fishing industries. Again the students on these placements had a more responsive attitude to conventional schooling.

Overall the term 'hybrid vigour' seems appropriate. That is new systems and programmes create energy and enthusiasm for the staff and students involved. All the schools I visited were interested in what other schools were offering and all schools mentioned above seemed determined to meet their student need as best they could. The link with a local polytech seems to be worthwhile for pathways type programmes but is problematic for schools outside of commuting distance.

My thanks to all the schools I visited for giving their time so willingly and being able to share their practice and ideas. I found these visits reassuring as schools seemed determined to do 'the best for their students'.

My thanks to MOE for creating the sabbaticals they are much appreciated by every-one who gains one!! RP