

**Hauraki Plains College**



**Focus: Student-centred Leadership through a Futures-focused Lens.**

**Purpose:**

*There is widespread acknowledgement of the critical, yet complex, relationship between school leadership and the achievement and wellbeing outcomes for students. This sabbatical report considers this relationship through a future-focused lens.*

**Executive Summary:**

As educational leaders, we require a working knowledge of current best practices in leadership, ultimately to make a difference in the learning and the lives of the young people in our care. At the same time, we are required to have a futures perspective to make sense of our work if we are to fully discharge our responsibility to individuals and to society in preparing our students for their future lives. The focus of this sabbatical study was to consider school leadership through a future-focused lens and the complexity of balancing this perspective with the current realities and demands of the principal's role.

**Methodology**

My sabbatical studies largely comprised of the following:

1. Exploring current research findings around school leadership that makes a difference to student outcomes in the secondary context. The key resource for this was Viviane Robinson's (2011). *Student-Centred Leadership*. This readable and practical resource builds on the Best Evidence Synthesis (2009): *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*.
2. Researching and reading on the meaning and implications of having a future-focused perspective in education. Key sources include:
  - a. Bolstad, Rachel (2011). *Taking a 'future focus' in education – what does it mean?*  
NZCER: Wellington.

- b. Bolstad, R & Gilbert, J with S McDowall, A Bull, S Boyd & R Hipkins (2012). *Supporting future-oriented learning and teaching – a New Zealand perspective. Report to the Ministry of Education*. NZCER: Wellington.
- c. Gilbert, Jane (2005). *Catching the Knowledge Wave: the Knowledge Society and the Future of Education*. NZCER: Wellington.
- d. Crocket, Lee; Jukes, Ian & Churches, Andrew (2011). *Literacy is Not enough. 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Fluencies for the Digital Age*. USA: Corwin Press.

### 3. Workshops and school visits:

During the sabbatical time, I was also involved in two workshops and school visits, all of which were interesting and invaluable experiences:

- i) Ian Dukes (Sydney): '*Twenty-first century Fluency Project*.' Sponsored by Australian Council for Educational Leadership.
- ii) Malachi Pancoast (Porirua): '*How to work less, produce more and still get the job done in a sensible week*'. Sponsored by Mana Education Centre.
- iii) Visits to Otorohanga College (student outcomes) and Queen Charlotte College (involving parents in student conferences).

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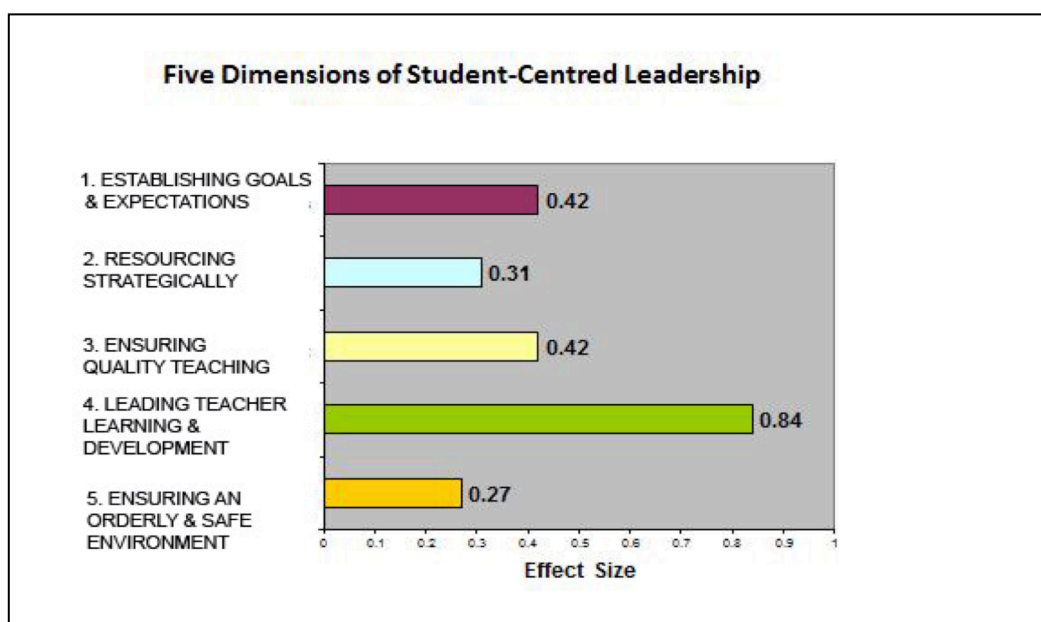
## **Research Findings Part A: Doing Today's Work Well**

### Five Essential Leadership Practices that Impact on Student Outcomes

It has been said that the best preparation for tomorrow is to do today's work well. Arguably the most well known recent work around school leadership that makes a difference to student achievement and wellbeing outcomes is the Best Evidence Synthesis *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why* (MOE; 2009). Building on this, Robinson (2011) explores the five key leadership practices that make the biggest difference to student outcomes with relevant examples and practical information pertaining to the knowledge and skills that leaders need in their leadership practice. These five leadership dimension with effect size are as follows:

1. Establishing goals and expectations which provide a sense of purpose and priority, developing staff commitment to goals and ensuring they have the capacity to meet them (0.42).

2. Resourcing strategically in allocating and organising funding, time and staffing in ways that increase the likelihood of achieving the organisational goals (0.31).
3. Ensuring Quality Teaching through promoting and taking an active role in the oversight of the instructional programme and setting clear performance standards for teaching (0.42).
4. Leading teacher learning and development through establishing a culture where teachers take collective responsibility and accountability for student achievement and wellbeing (0.84).
5. Ensuring an Orderly and Safe Environment by establishing clear and consistently high expectations for behaviour and learning (0.27).



Source: Robinson (2011); 9.

### The Secondary Context.

In the secondary school context, Bendikson, Robinson and Hattie's (2012) study on the instructional leadership of the secondary school principal differentiated between direct and indirect leadership practices. Direct leadership practices include setting and communicating goals, planning and co-ordinating teaching and the curriculum, leading and co-ordinating professional development and developing a sense of collective responsibility. Indirect leadership behaviours include creating an orderly environment, problem solving and strategic resourcing.

### School Culture – Effect Sizes



Source: Bendikson (2013). Address to BOPPA Conference 2013.

Bendikson's own research found that in secondary schools, principals are more likely to focus on indirect than direct leadership practices than in primary schools since middle leaders such as heads of departments take on much of the direct instructional leadership. Furthermore the best predictor of high performing secondary schools was ensuring an orderly environment. In other words, in high performing schools, the 'trains run on time.' Basic systems and processes therefore should not be dismissed as management and the poor cousin to leadership, since effective management underpins high performance. By contrast, principals in improving schools were more likely to use direct instructional leadership to achieve improvement.

#### Being Present in the Game.

Being vitally involved in direct instructional leadership is a real challenge for principals given the complexity of the job. Malachi's Pancoast workshop which I attended, '*How to work less, produce more and still get the job done in a sensible week*', was both refreshing and helpful. Pancoast likens what happens in school to a game of rugby in which teachers are the players and the principal the coach. It follows therefore, according to Pancoast, that if we consider where the so-called game is being played, the response has to be - in the classroom. Pancoast argues that coaching is not a 'doing' job so much as a 'being' job. Just showing up regularly in classrooms is often enough to encourage teachers to sharpen up. Being present is what counts.

*"Great coaches never impact the outcome of a game by sitting behind a desk all day. Great coaches are on the field where the game is being played. Your job as instructional leader is to be 'on the field' where the game is being played, and in your case, that's the classroom."*

(Malachi Pancoast)

Since returning from sabbatical leave and endeavouring to make regular visits to classrooms has been a game changer for my leadership practice. It has enabled me to reconnect with what is happening at the chalk face, to monitor the quality of classroom teaching which has been fed back to curriculum leaders and to gain an understanding of how our professional learning focus has or has not been translated to the classroom. As a senior leadership team, we intend to continue with being where 'the game is being played' and expecting curriculum leaders to make regular classroom visits a part of their own leadership practices.

### **Research Findings Part B: Thinking about Tomorrow**

What the future holds for our young people.

While it is important to reflect on our leadership practices to satisfy the current legitimate expectations of the Ministry of Education and our Boards of Trustees, we also have a moral imperative to take a futures-perspective in our work. As educators, we must have this perspective if we are to fully discharge our responsibility to individuals and society in preparing our students for their future lives. Ensuring that 85% plus of our school leavers achieve NCEA is important, but a futures-perspective asks why is this important and how well will it ensure that the young person has is equipped to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work and life? In a turbulent, technologically-sophisticated and socially-complex world, educators at all levels are required to scan the horizon and develop an appreciation of what the future holds for the young people in our care.

While it is not possible to accurately predict the future, there are some key broad trend lines which help us to make sense of the 21<sup>st</sup> century context:

a) Globalisation: the world wide movement towards greater connectedness and interdependence in terms of peoples, economies, trade and communication among nations. Our young people will be living and working in this internationally connected global and social landscape.

b) Increasing Diversity: of ethnicities, cultures, lifestyles, beliefs within societies and communities is a fact of life in 21<sup>st</sup> century life and work. The capacity to work and live in inclusive ways with people of very different world views, cultures and backgrounds from our own is a must in an increasingly diverse society.

c) The relentless pace of change brought about by new technologies: these are a given in the 21<sup>st</sup> century social and economic landscape; however it is not just that new technologies are changing our world, but the fact that they are altering the landscape at an exponential pace. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2011) argue that we are just now at the point on the curve when the relentless pace of change we have experienced in the last few years is about to increase exponentially and in astounding proportions.

d) "Wicked" problems: refer to those 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges which cannot be solved using traditional straight forward solutions (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012). These significant and serious challenges of our times tend to be persistent and span multiple domains including social, economic, political, environmental, legal and moral and are highly complex and value laden. Climate change, persistent poverty, waste disposal and biodiversity are examples of these so-called wicked problems.

e) Work and Career Patterns: as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, work and employment patterns are rapidly changing. If work can be outsourced or sent offshore, or turned into hardware or software, or automated, it will be. In the work culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are seeing a significant decline in agriculture and factory jobs as well as a levelling off of service type work. The creative class such as those involved in innovation technologies and business enterprise, however, is on the rise. In this new work environment, poor wages for routine work, fixed term contracts and job insecurity are disturbing trends. Standing (2011) identifies a growing number of people across the world living and working precariously, usually in a series of short-term jobs, without recourse to stable occupational identities, social protection or protective regulations. He argues that with increasing job insecurity, financial hardship and civic disengagement, the so-called 'Precariat' (vulnerable young people, living a precarious existence) will create new instabilities in society.

f) Credential inflation: in the global marketplace for jobs, credential inflation is a reality; it is no longer a given that higher qualifications, even at university level, is a guarantee of a stable and sufficient incomes for the 'good life' (Brown et al, 2011). The story we tell students – work hard, get NCEA, go on to tertiary education and you will get a job – is unlikely to hold true for an increasing number of young people.

g) Twenty first century views of knowledge: Gilbert (2005) has championed in New Zealand the argument that the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires us to think differently about the meaning and purpose of knowledge. In this new view of knowledge, 'knowing' is no longer about stuff in our heads to reproduce for the test or in case we might need it some day. Knowing is more like a verb, an energy that is a creative force that enables

new knowledge and ideas to come forth. Knowledge is therefore created within networks, in the space between people and people, and people and ideas in response to specific problems and challenges as they emerge. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century society, people who are able to work with knowledge to create new knowledge and innovate are the key resource for a nation's economic and social development and wellbeing. This implies the development of a school curriculum that develops the capacity for young people to learn and work in knowledge-building ways.

If we accept these global trends as leaders, what should our response be? The 21<sup>st</sup> century trends as outlined above have far reaching implications for school leaders and raises a number of important questions. Why do schools exist? What do we mean by an 'educated' person? How does this change those five critical leadership dimensions which Robinson identifies? How might our goals and aspirations for schooling change? How would we define quality teaching in this context? How would we support teachers to refocus on developing students with the capacity to learn? How might the school environment and structures change? How should we resource to ensure our students are prepared for working and living in the world they are about to enter?

### Implications for Leadership

Holding aspirations for leading in a future-oriented perspective is one thing, knowing how to go about this is quite another matter. Bolstad & Gilbert (2011) suggest that there are three critical areas of focus for educators:

1. Thinking about students in their future lives. How do we think education will help them in their future lives? What kinds of people do we hope they will be?
2. The future of schooling. How might the curriculum, teaching and learning need to change to better meet the opportunities and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work and life?
3. How will we prepare young people and communities to deal with "future-focused" issues including the 'wicked problems' of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as those linked with sustainability, globalisation, citizenship and enterprise for example.

These three areas will be addressed in turn.

### Thinking about students in their future lives.

Thinking about students in their future lives: at a basic level, we need to support learners in recognising that they have a stake in the future, and a role and responsibility as citizens to take action to help shape that future. The development of critical capacities needs to become a real focus if we are to be serious

about the kinds of people our students need to be if they are to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Part of my sabbatical time was spent in revisiting the NZ Curriculum key competencies through a future-focused lens and developing a document which we could use to explore and deepen our understanding of the key competencies and their place within our teaching and learning programmes. This document is available from the author and identifies what sort of young people and the capacities they will need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ie

- ✓ Lifelong and life-wise learners who strive to acquire the literacies of an educated person.
- ✓ Creative and critical thinkers who finds solutions and imagines new possibilities.
- ✓ Diligent and self-disciplined people who pursue quality work and a healthy lifestyle.
- ✓ Respectful and reciprocal communicators who work effectively with diverse others.
- ✓ Ethical and participating contributors who seek meaning and purpose beyond self, including altruistic service and environmental stewardship.

#### Thinking about the future of schooling, teaching and learning.

Clearly the *what* and *how* of teaching and learning will need to change if we are both to prepare our students well for their future lives and meet their expectations of us as educators. As an old saying goes, we cannot confine our children to our own learning, for they were born in a different time. Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) identify six emerging themes of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education system which is a useful starting point for school leaders who wish to pursue a future-oriented perspective. These are personalising learning; new views of equity, diversity and inclusivity; a curriculum that uses knowledge to develop learning capacity; rethinking learners' and teachers' roles; a culture of continuous learning for teachers and educational leaders and new kinds of partnerships and relationships with and in the wider community. New technologies and the role of collaborative or networked school clusters are also considered in the report as sub themes.

While as leaders and teachers, we may well agree with this moral imperative for change, the question that arises is: so what does this look like in the classroom? The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fluency Project offers a way forward in that it provides a practical process for developing essential future-oriented ways of working in the classroom. Attending Lee Crockett's workshop on the 21<sup>st</sup> century fluencies, sponsored by the Australian Council for Educational Leadership, was very relevant to this sabbatical focus. The core fluencies as outlined on the project website ([www.fluency21.com](http://www.fluency21.com)) with a brief description are:

- Solution fluency: the ability to think creatively to solve problems in real time by clearly defining the problem, designing an appropriate solution, delivering the solution and then evaluating the process



and the outcome. This is about whole-brain thinking - creativity and problem solving applied on-demand.

- Creativity Fluency: the process by which artistic proficiency adds meaning through design, art and storytelling. It is about using innovative design to add value to the function of a product through the form.
- Collaboration Fluency: is team working proficiency that has reached the unconscious ability to work cooperatively with virtual and real partners in an online environment to solve problems and create original products.
- Information Fluency: the ability to unconsciously and intuitively interpret information in all forms and formats in order to extract the essential knowledge, authenticate it, and perceive its meaning and significance.
- Media Fluency: includes both the ability to look analytically at any communication to interpret the real message, and evaluate the efficacy of the chosen medium as well as the capacity to create original communications by aligning the message and audience through the most appropriate and effective medium.
- Global Digital Citizenship: all the 21st Century fluencies are learned within the context of the notion of Global Digital Citizen, using the guiding principles of leadership, ethics, altruistic service, environmental stewardship, global citizenship, digital citizenship and personal responsibility.

The Fluency21 Project provides practical support and a viable scaffold to begin to change how teaching and learning might look in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom and is, in my opinion, worthy of closer attention. To be clear here, I am not suggesting that if a school takes on board the 21<sup>st</sup> century fluencies, then it is doing 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. As with anything, it is possible to interpret and implement the fluencies in old well trodden ways and for traditional purposes; however, we need to start somewhere and the fluencies provide such a place.

Thinking about preparing young people and communities to deal with "future-focused" issues.

From one perspective, it is imperative that we support and encourage learners to recognise that they have a stake in the future, and a role and responsibility as citizens to take action to help shape that future. From another perspective, learners have their own expectations of the schooling process. According to Washor & Mojoswski (2013), digital age learners are demanding for example the following:

- Relationships: do my teachers and other adults care about me and my interests and talents? Do I matter?
- Relevance: do I find what the school is teaching to be relevant to my interests and future?

- Authenticity: is the learning and work I do regarded as significant outside of school and for my future?
- Application: do I have opportunities to apply what I am learning in real-world settings and contexts?
- Challenge: do I feel appropriately challenged in my learning and work?

Clearly, how we prepare our young people to take their place in the community and how we see the role of community in the educative process will need considerable re-thinking beyond the current practices of consulting with parents and whanau or asking for help at working bees for example. Bull (2011) identifies three reasons why forging new partnerships with our communities is important:

- I. The 21<sup>st</sup> century learning literature argues that today's students need to engage in real, relevant, collaborative solution-finding and knowledge-generating activities in authentic contexts. Education ought to prepare people for a life of real-world living including problem solving. Beyond the school gates, the wider community even at a local level, is rich with real contexts connected with the significant future focussed issues highlighted in the NZ Curriculum document including sustainability, citizenship, enterprise and globalisation.
- II. In order to engage authentically in these real and relevant issues, schools will need to look to the community to provide the different and diverse kinds of expertise, support and input than what they can provide "in house".
- III. If schools are to achieve the required shift in focus to ensure that young people are equipped to meet the realities of life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and bearing in mind that education is a publicly contested arena, requires the development of community understanding of and support for future-oriented ideas.

## **Conclusion:**

As a school leader, it seems that we must hold two aspects of our work in tension. We are legitimately accountable for the educational outcomes in our schools including achievement outcomes and qualifications. In reality, these outcomes are critical to our credibility as leaders. At the same time we have an ethical responsibility to prepare our students for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we therefore cannot ignore the global trends beyond our school walls and the implications of that for schools, our students and for teaching and learning. What is now required of school leaders is an alternative imagination that is not about doing things better. We need to do things differently but our default positions are strong and there is no map, model or blueprint for this; we have to make it up as we go. This calls for

more complex leadership than what is outlined in the Best Evidence Synthesis research on the type of leadership that makes a difference for student outcomes.

It is not that the five dimensions of student leadership as described by Robinson (2011) are necessarily unhelpful or irrelevant, only that they need to be interpreted with the futures of our students in mind. As leaders we have to be therefore both student-centred and future-focused. We have to meet current expectations from the Ministry and our communities while keeping our sights firmly on the horizon. This is not an 'either / or' but rather an 'and ... and.'

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