

**2013 Sabbatical Report
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Focus of My Sabbatical:

Ideas to help realize the community's overarching strategic vision that Selwyn College become *'the school of choice for the local community'*; through revitalising my leadership and embedding and enhancing the school's *'significant transformation'* (ERO, 2012).

May 2013 marked the 5 year anniversary of my Principalship of Selwyn College in Auckland. I was appointed to the role by a Board of Trustees which shortly afterwards, was replaced by a Commissioner. At the time, the Minister of Education Hon. Anne Tolley labeled Selwyn College a *'failing school'* and cited poor student achievement, a declining roll and a lack of faith in the governance of the college as evidence. Hence, my task as the new Principal was to restore community confidence in the college by turning it around.

I relished the educational leadership challenge this presented and the changes we introduced impacted on every aspect of the college from teaching and learning - to relationships - to systems and structures. The outcome was that the ERO report on Selwyn College released in 2012, described the college as having undergone *'a significant transformation'*. Hence, after some extraordinarily challenging but hugely rewarding years of leading change, the 'first phase' of my Principalship drew to an end. Interestingly, this coincided with the return of a Board of Trustees.

Just as the last five years have been exceedingly important in Selwyn's history, so too are the next few years, when I will be in the 'second phase' of my Principalship. This will be the time when the fundamental changes must be truly embedded and enhanced for Selwyn to achieve the overarching strategic vision that it become *'the school of choice for the local community'*. My sabbatical specifically focused on preparing me to lead this, through revitalizing my vision and practice as a leader and using a 'magpie approach' to gather across the spectrum of school life that could further enhance Selwyn's *'significant transformation'*.

To this end, I attended two inspirational and cutting-edge courses on educational leadership in the UK, I took the opportunity to read and reflect on the contents of some recent professional literature, I interviewed several internationally-recognised experts in education and I visited several schools in the UK and Australia which have succeeded in winning community confidence.

My participation in the **British Annual School Leadership Conference: *Seizing Success 2013*** provided some of the best learning of my sabbatical. In the UK, Ofsted inspectors visit and grade schools in terms of their overall performance. Those judged as demonstrating the best possible practice are graded 'outstanding'. During this conference, I participated in a workshop led by educational analysts from the National College for Teaching and Leadership which addressed the critical question:

What do leaders in schools graded 'outstanding' do differently from the rest?

The findings of the National College's research were presented as **'The Building Blocks of Successful School Leadership'**:

Stage 1: Getting the right staff on and off the bus, the right behavior, the right vision

Stage 2: Driving whole-school improvement – through initiatives, actions and ideas

Stage 3: Targeting improvement using data – differentiated and contextualized

Stage 4 and final stage: **STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE** -

- i. Looking ahead for new legislation and curriculum innovation
- ii. Preparing students for life beyond school
- iii. Ensuring student pastoral care and wellbeing
- iv. Pursuing excellence relentlessly and within a culture of care for the school community

These research findings articulated for me a highly meaningful framework for what we are doing at Selwyn, as well as providing an anchor and guide for where we are heading. The task of enhancing Selwyn's '*significant transformation*' over the next few years is in reality, concerned with '*Staying ahead of the Curve*'.

The stages identified above, also provide a framework within which I have considered the ideas gathered during my sabbatical. As we move forward at Selwyn, we must ensure that we continue to deliver excellence in each stage – as point iv. above demands. At the start of 2013, we launched our new school-wide Learning Toolkit which identifies what high quality teaching and learning looks like and also provides the model for our whole school to achieve this. It facilitates 'action research' which Professor Andrew Pollard of the Institute of Education London in his workshop - ***Research into Practice: how can schools use evidence more effectively to drive improvement?*** - identified as, '*the solution for sustainability*'. As a school, we must continuously examine the data, identify the issues, pose the deep questions and use the evidence to find solutions. These solutions must be personalized, fit the need and be evaluated.

In my discussions with Wanda Golinski, Executive Principal of Southfields Academy in London, which has an Ofsted grading of 'outstanding', I noted her insistence about the importance of identifying '*in-school variations*'. Her view reflected that of Professor Pollard; namely, that personalization must supplant a 'one-size fits all' approach. To this end, Southfields Academy has a rigorous and regular monitoring cycle based on progress measures to ensure the standard of achievement is on track. The Heads of Learning Areas attend regular Standards Meetings to consider discrepancies and to identify personalized / differentiated responses.

In our relentless pursuit of excellence at Selwyn then, not only the school leaders but also every individual teacher, must be thoroughly concerned with what Professor John Hattie, University of Melbourne, emphasised in my discussions with him and also in his publication, ***Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximising Impact on Learning*** (2012). It is not just about what a teacher is doing that is important, it is about the impact of what a teacher does on student learning and achievement. We must all be what Hattie terms 'critical evaluators' of the effect we are having on our students' learning. This impact is identified by gathering evidence, implementing differentiated solutions for improvement and evaluating their

effectiveness in order to keep doing better. There is a *Checklist for 'visible learning inside'* in the appendix of his book which is a brilliant tool for us to measure our progress on this significant journey.

In terms of the challenge of *'Staying ahead of the Curve'*, one of the most significant items of professional literature I read during my sabbatical was ***The Global Fourth Way: The Quest for Educational Excellence*** (2012), by Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley. As these authors explain, in accordance with the Sigmoid Curve, schools undergoing change are at risk of ascending up a steepening curve of improvement and then begin to level off before embarking on a gradual then precipitous decline. Hence, it's before the peak of performance that the dynamics of decline already occur. This means that *before* the existing way of producing results has reached its zenith, we need to be rethinking what kinds of results we want and how to get them going forward. This, in essence, is the new challenge for Selwyn over the next few years.

Hargreaves and Shirley ask: Should we restrict ourselves to pursuing 'The Third Way', which is 'incremental innovation', refining and improving our existing practice to make it more effective or should we be embracing 'disruptive innovation' which involves completely transforming our existing practice to deliver the same outcome with a far superior result? As they explain, History shows that innovation is difficult for reasons like parental beliefs about 'real schooling' and teachers' insistence on subject hegemony and work load, which pull schools back to the norm of practices established for a very different society than our present one. Yet, rapid technological advances demand continual innovation from within, for students whose lives are undergoing profound transformations.

Hence, the authors propose what they term 'The Fourth Way' - pursuing innovation whilst at the same time be continuously improving. They acknowledge the pluses of 'incremental improvement' which are all familiar to us in our practice at Selwyn, including raised expectations for achievement, tracking, benchmarking, goal setting, a common language to talk about achieving, improved pedagogies and teachers learning from each other. However, they urge school leaders to harmonize 'incremental improvements' and 'disruptive innovations' and not put one before the other.

As we implement the strategic goal of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) at Selwyn for example, it will be essential for us to harmonise improvement and innovation. As Hargreaves and Shirley state, new technologies promise dramatic transformations in teaching and learning. However, their un-moderated over-zealous embracement as an answer to the challenge of educational change can result in classroom interactions which are at risk of being superficial and distracted. Instead, we will need to heed the pointers for change presented by these authors and create *'platforms for change'* that will enable our teachers to build the capacities to be mindful and reflective about the effective use of new technologies. I noted that as part of creating a platform for change at Boxhill High School in Melbourne all teachers were given an Ipad and a \$50 App card. Through this action, the school was building its *'professional capital'*.

In ***The Global Fourth Way: The Quest for Educational Excellence*** the authors assert that critical to all educational change is the creation of *'professional capital'*. This argument is set

out in detail in another significant piece of professional reading undertaken during my sabbatical. In ***Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*** (2013), Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan argue that since we know that the quality of teaching influences students' learning the most, we also need to know how to create high quality teachers. Hence, they liken teachers to capital - assets that can be leveraged to accomplish desired results. They contend that investing in teachers, who are 'professional capital', is what the highest performing countries are doing. Hence, these authors present sets of Guidelines for Teachers and Guidelines for Leaders on enacting change. These guidelines constitute an extremely useful resource for discussion, reflection and action amongst our community as we tackle the challenge of '*Staying Ahead of the Curve*'.

Furthermore, the creation of 'professional partnerships', where teachers act as mentors and coaches for each other will build leadership capacity within our school and greatly assist the fulfilment of these guidelines. Chris Hagget, the Vice Principal of George Spencer Academy in Birmingham - another school with an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating explained to me that this was certainly the case for his school.

Also extremely useful for enhancing the professional capital at Selwyn are the findings of the **OECD Innovative Learning Environments Project**. These findings were drawn to my attention at a second conference I attended in the UK for international educational leaders titled: ***Leading Schools into the Future***. This conference was organized by the National College of Teaching and Leadership in Nottingham. The findings have been edited into a useful form - ***The Nature of Learning - Practitioners Guide: Using Research to Inspire Practice*** (2012) Dumont, Istance and Benavides (Eds). They provide a knowledge base for the design of 21st century learning environments. Continuing to develop our teachers' capacities in each of the following building blocks for innovative learning environments will be critical to '*Staying Ahead of the Curve*'.

- *Cooperative Learning* - preparing students for an increasingly collaborative work force
- *Service Learning* - education which engages students in community service that is integrated with the learning objectives of the core academic curricula. This experiential approach is premised on providing students with contextualised learning experiences based on authentic real world situations in their communities.
- *Home-school Partnerships* - building connections is vital to learner success and means proactively involving families in their children's schooling
- *Learning with Technology*
- *Formative Assessment*
- *Inquiry-based approaches* - important in developing students higher order cognitive skills

One of the Principles for Learning presented in the OECD findings is the need to build horizontal connections. The ability for learners to see horizontal connectedness between their formal learning environment and their communities and the wider world promotes authentic learning and fosters deep understanding. *Service Learning*, listed above, provides one means of facilitating this and must be a prime consideration in future Curriculum Innovation. My findings on sabbatical have convinced me that our shrinking, multicultural, diverse world demands that we enhance students' learning opportunities in a manner that connects them with real life and the wider world.

In London, I interviewed Pauline Hoyle, an Ofsted inspector and Associate Director of Myscience.co Limited. She has inspected many schools in the UK and she places huge importance on schools ensuring that their curriculum offers students rich real world experiences not only to promote deep understanding but also to foster engagement. She cited practical examples such as getting industry people to work with students in a problem-solving activity, acting as resources to assist when asked questions; encouraging student participation in competitions, trips and awards; bringing in high profile inspirational speakers linked to the curriculum; and getting young speakers and university students to work with students.

I witnessed wonderful evidence of the success of some of these strategies during a visit to The University High School in Melbourne. This included their Year 10 Galileo Programme – rich tasks that involve community service and their Gtak Gene Technology Access Centre in which PhD students run labs and often involve the school's senior students. Last year, their Student Council raised \$10,000 to build a school in East Timor and each year they run reciprocal exchange trips for about 20 students for 3 weeks a year with a sister school in Hamburg. Rob Newton, Principal expressed pride in the way his school is developing in students a deep awareness of their role as world citizens. Auckland Girls' Grammar which I also visited on my sabbatical is also strong on the notion of sister schools and student exchanges.

Another school I visited was Melbourne Girls' Grammar. It has an Enrichment Programme in every learning area which aims to connect students with real life experiences and the wider world. So for example, Enrichment in English includes a 'Writers in Residence' programme which provides students with access to contemporary writers; while the Global Connections Enrichment Programme provides students with experiences that extend their understanding of being a global citizen, enrich their cultural intelligence and challenge them with authentic global issues, such as an International Woman's Day Conference.

During my visit to the George Spencer Academy in Birmingham the Vice Principal spoke of their Challenge Days when they collapse the timetable for students to engage in rich problem-solving activities. The school also promotes active citizenship through opportunities for students to go on trips eg. to Argentina and Kilimanjaro. In Year 10, their students can graduate once they have completed 10 tasks – one of which is to have been on a trip.

During my visits, I was also keen to find out what schools were doing to address other elements of Stage 4 of the National College's '**Building Blocks of Successful School Leadership**'; particularly around ensuring student pastoral care and wellbeing and in preparing them for life beyond school. Glen Waverley Secondary College in Melbourne for example, sets aside 'Living and Learning' time for this purpose and Melbourne Girls' Grammar has an extensive programme which includes pastoral care curriculum, academic management and personal mentoring. Their pastoral care curriculum includes Personal dimension sessions are designed to provide the foundation upon which academic success rests and include: Study Skills, Nutrition advice and consultation, Stress management and guidance, Resume writing skills, Risk management awareness, Qualification skills, information and management and Careers education. The school expects all students to

map out and manage their learning pathway. Mentors work one on one with students assisting them to set and meet learning goals. They also act as advocates, learning advisers and are the first point of contact for parents, students and teachers.

All of the schools I visited believe that Home-school Partnerships are vital to learner success and this means proactively involving families in their children's schooling. To this end, Southfields Academy in London has Action Learning Days once a term and the George Spencer Academy in Birmingham has two Learning Review days. Pauline Hoyle, Ofsted inspector, stressed the need for parental involvement in setting targets and reviewing progress and the absolute importance of getting parents involved as soon as a concern emerges and ensuring that both they *and* the student know what to do.

During my sabbatical, I encountered a wealth of ideas about the sort of leadership needed for the future. For example, in his keynote address at the **British Annual School Leadership Conference: Seizing Success 2013** Sir Terry Leahy, Former CEO of TESCO urged those present to take teachers beyond where they go themselves by capturing their hearts and minds. Another speaker, Sir Ken Robinson echoed this idea when he talked of the Principal's key role in creating the tone, the atmosphere, the culture in which people go about their work. The Principal must set the cultural boundaries - what's ok what's not - in a way that allows all those in the school to flourish. Another keynote speaker at the same conference was Jim Lawless, CEO of the Velocity Corporation who spoke about his **Ten Rules for Taming Tigers**. The tiger is the voice of self-doubt; the thing that stops you doing what you in your heart and soul want to do so that you do not write the story you really want. . At Glen Waverley Secondary College, Assistant Principal, Colin Warner spoke of the importance of distributed leadership and building leadership capacity in everyone.

The single overwhelming message that consistently percolated to the top in both my reading and my discussions, was the need to have passion and to be relentless. Wanda Golinski, the outstanding Executive Principal at Southfields Academy, identified these as two of her key characteristics, along with reflection. Pauline Hoyle called for '*a relentless focus on underachievement*'. John Hattie argues that teachers must be '*passionate*' and '*inspired*' since they are the major players in the educative process. Hargreaves and Shirley identify the ingredients for successful educational change as, '*a mix of creative intensity with relentless perseverance*'. Plus, Hargreaves and Fullan demand we are '*relentless dynamos*'. Colin Warner, Assistant Principal at Glen Waverley Secondary College, summed up how they view things at his school and in doing so, echoed my own feelings, '*We are doing well but we must remain disappointed*'. Yes, Selwyn College has undergone a '*significant transformation*' but there is so much more we need to do to be '*Staying ahead of the curve*'.

References

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