

Secondary Principal Sabbatical Report

“An Examination of Various Practices in Secondary Schools in the Areas of Careers, Transition and Vocational Education”

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Time Frame

Leave was taken from my position as principal of Cromwell College for the first two terms of 2007 (15 January to 15 July). 10 weeks of this period was paid study leave funded by the Ministry of Education Principals' Sabbatical Programme and the remainder of the time was personal leave without pay. In addition to the sabbatical investigations I also undertook the Ministry of Education's Principal Development and Planning Centre (PDPC) course in January.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the principals and staff of the 10 institutions visited for their willingness to give up their valuable time and energy in assisting me with my investigations. It is encouraging to see how willing schools are to share their programmes and knowledge with others. This high level of collegiality is a positive element in the New Zealand secondary education system.

I would also like to acknowledge the Ministry of Education for their provision of the principal sabbatical awards and the Cromwell College Board of Trustees for granting leave from my duties as principal of the College.

Background

Cromwell College is a Year 7 – 13, New Zealand state secondary school located in the town of Cromwell in Central Otago. The population of the town and surrounding area is approximately 3750 (2006 census) and the student population at the school is approximately 375. Both the school and the town are in a stage of steady growth through rapid expansion in the local economy especially in the areas of light industry, horticulture and viticulture and tourism support. Generally speaking unemployment in the town is low and the opportunities for student employment both on a part-time or full-time basis is high. There is an outpost of the Otago Polytechnic located in Cromwell which among other things provides courses in areas such as horticulture, viticulture, turf management and catering and hospitality.

Purpose and Rationale

This report is written mainly for the use and consideration of Cromwell College and the style and focus of the report are constructed with the Board of Trustees and Senior Management team in mind to assist them with strategic planning.

The purpose of this sabbatical was to examine practices in other schools related to transition and vocational education. Transition and vocational education is an area of strategic focus for the Cromwell College Board of Trustees. The school's charter sets out 10 major goals for the school to achieve on a long-term basis. The Cromwell College Charter states that

Students at Cromwell College will leave the College well-equipped to take on the challenges of life beyond compulsory education . . . (and that) We will ensure that students have access to careers and guidance education and where appropriate to work experience opportunities.

Specifically the College's Strategic Plan (2007 – 2010) lays out the following goal:

The College will have a strategic focus on transition, careers and vocational education. The specific targets sought are:

95% of the students who leave secondary schooling from this College will proceed to gainful employment, formal post-secondary education or some other formal training or employment scheme.

75% of the students who leave secondary schooling from this College will within 18 months of leaving school proceed to formal post-secondary education or some other formal training scheme.

The general idea of the sabbatical was to examine a range of schools to gain a broader understanding of the types of programmes running in a variety of schools and how these programmes might work in the context of Cromwell College. Through conversations with principals and staff, examining school programmes and comparison with current practice at Cromwell College the intention was to gain insight into what programmes or procedures might be considered at Cromwell College to help the school achieve their strategic focus and targets on transition, careers and vocational education. The original intention was to examine five schools in Otago-Southland and five schools in North America. Various circumstances precluded this from happening and the final examination involved eight schools in the Otago-Southland region, one school in California and the Transition to Work Trust in Dunedin.

On a more personal note, as a senior manager in secondary schools for 13 years I have noticed a trend in schools, in the media, by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and by the Education Review Office (ERO) to value, promote, praise and quantify academic achievement in the traditional subjects, in the number of students gaining university entrance, in student retention through the end of Year 13, in the numbers of students going on to traditional tertiary study (university, teachers' colleges, degree programmes at polytechnics) and other such measures of school success.

Rarely have I seen media praise or indeed high praise from schools themselves in matters such as numbers of students gaining apprenticeships, numbers of students leaving school and taking up gainful employment, etc. This is not to say that these things are not valued and supported in schools. It is very apparent when visiting schools that these programmes and outcomes are clearly valued by management, staff and students. Through the provision of staffing, alternative programmes, work experience etc. schools show the value they place on these programmes. However, it does seem that media exposure and public education concerning these could be more extensive.

Activities Undertaken

Eight schools were visited in the Otago-Southland region, one in Central California and a non-school "transition trust". These institutions were selected to provide a wide cross section of school type (rural, urban, single sex, co-educational) and size. Visited were:

- 1 **Kings' High School** (Dunedin, large, urban, single-sex, Years 9 – 13)
- 2 **Kaikorai Valley College** (Dunedin, large urban, co-ed, Years 7 – 13)
- 3 **Queens' High School** (Dunedin, large urban, single-sex girls, Years 9 – 13)
- 4 **Taieri College** (Mosgiel, large, urban/town, co-ed, Years 7 – 13)
- 5 **Menzies College** (Southland, small, rural, co-ed, Years 7 – 13)
- 6 **James Hargest High School** (Invercargill, large, urban, co-ed, Years 7 – 13)
- 7 **Central Southland College** (Southland, small, rural, co-ed, Years 7 – 13)
- 8 **Southland Boys' High School** (Invercargill, large, single-sex, Years 7 – 13)
- 9 **Merced High School** (California, very large, urban, coed, Years 10 – 13)
- 10 **Transition to Work Trust** (Dunedin – organisation to assist young people into work)

Visits to schools commenced with a philosophical discussion with the principal or a member of the senior management team who has an oversight of the guidance, transition, careers areas of the school. These discussions focused on

the school's philosophy of transition education, BOT involvement, community involvement etc. The following is the range of questions asked to the principal.

- 1 Does the school have a policy on transition education?
- 2 Does the school have stated aims, strategic goals related to transition education, work experience, careers education, Gateway, etc.?
- 3 Describe any formal programmes related to transition education.
- 4 Does the school run any specialist programmes related to work experience, building academies, catering academics, etc.?
- 5 Are there any special requirements for students for these programmes?
- 6 Does the school have an active work experience programme and how does this operate?
- 7 Does the school have an active Gateway programme and how does this operate?
- 8 Do you have any statistics related to success in your Gateway programmes?
- 9 Does the school have an active programme of transition education, work placements, etc? Where do you see these programmes going in the future?
- 10 Do any BOT members have transition education as part of their portfolio?
- 11 What is the principal's personal vision for transition education, work experience, etc. Where do you see these programmes going in the future?
- 12 Have you involved the local business community in any innovative ways?
- 13 Have you done any education for your parents/caregivers regarding these areas?
- 14 Do you track your students in these areas while they are at school or after they leave school?
- 15 Have your programmes had any difference on student motivation, student retention, overall increased success at school, etc?

The purpose of these questions was not to formulate any statistics or numerical analysis but to gain an understanding of how these areas are working in the respective schools and gain an understanding of the senior management perspective.

After meeting with the principal or the senior management team I spent time in each school meeting with key staff, watching classes and programmes in action and looking at school documentation. These staff included careers teachers, Gateway co-ordinators, work experience co-ordinators, teachers of specialist and vocational classes in the senior end of the school, etc. Once again the idea was not to formulate statistics but to try to form a holistic picture of how these areas were working in the school.

General Findings

Listed below are some of the general findings.

- 1 All principals had a good knowledge of the programmes that were running in their schools concerning careers and vocational education.
- 2 All principals also had a basic, stated philosophical belief that transition, careers and work experience education were all good things in schools and should be supported and encouraged.
- 3 Although Boards of Trustees had a basic understanding of programme structure and focus no school had a specific “Board-level” strategic focus or defined desired output for these areas.
- 4 No school had a Board member who had transition / careers / work exploration as a key portfolio.
- 5 All schools had a careers advisor who may or may not also have responsibility for work placements or work experience. Most careers advisors would like more time to do their work more effectively. One of the larger schools provided a full-time personal assistant to the Careers Advisor. Careers advisors are often people who carry significant responsibilities in other areas of the school including teaching, faculty management, pastoral care, etc. It can be challenging for them to give their full attention to the careers portion of their position.
- 6 All schools had senior option courses which were targeted towards vocational learning. The range of these courses included such traditional areas as catering and hospitality, building technology, outdoor education, horticulture, tourism and information technology to more non-traditional courses such as equine studies.
- 7 Some schools offered a traditional “transition”, “work experience” or “employment studies” class which focused on the teaching of basic unit standards in the core generic areas combined with work experience. Often the stated aim of these classes is to move students into the work force and out of school. In schools running these types of programmes the majority of students are effectively moving into the workforce.
- 8 Most schools had a physical area for career and work exploration. Often this was an area of the school library devoted to this purpose. Some of the schools (usually the larger ones) had dedicated spaces for careers and work exploration. Some of these spaces (once again in the larger schools) were quite elaborate and also contained work and office space for personnel such as the guidance counselor, careers advisor, work experience co-ordinator, etc.
- 9 Some schools are running academy-style programmes where students are intensively studying in one area or with one focus. These programmes included such areas as visual arts, fine arts, building, catering, etc.
- 10 Most schools did not have formal relationships with the local business community such as school sponsorships, school-business partnerships, etc.

- Schools made extensive use of the local business community for work experience, Gateway placements, etc.
- 11 The schools which were involved with Gateway largely perceived this to be a very positive experience for the school and the young people involved. Most schools found the administration of the Gateway programme to be demanding and time intensive but the results for the young people were very positive. Most schools noted that the Gateway coordinator is crucial to the overall success of the programme. The coordinator needs good public relations skills, good knowledge of adolescents and good networking with the local business community.
 - 12 Most schools have some type of tracking system for looking at where students go when they leave school but no schools continued to track students once they have left school. It was felt that this job will be done via the student tracking system co-ordinated in Otago-Southland by the Ministry of Education.
 - 13 In schools located close to a Polytechnic there was evidence of competition for students at the senior end of the school. This has placed pressure on schools as they are keen to retain their senior students.
 - 14 There is a wide range of industry placements in Gateway programmes in the various schools. These included trades, agriculture, engineering, building and construction, hairdressing, animal care, early childhood education, real estate, office administration, joinery, retail, etc.
 - 15 Many schools are running Young Enterprise schemes to introduce the students to the essentials of running and managing a business. This scheme is generally targeted at more academic students who may be interested in future careers in business management, business ownership, etc.
 - 16 Most schools are running traditional career modules for their students usually at Year 10. Students in years 11 – 13 are provided with opportunities to attend Career Expos, meet with industry experts, talk with apprenticeship co-ordinators, etc as well as continuing with some work in careers education and transition.
 - 17 Most schools are aware of the need to provide career education across the curriculum and across the year levels but this is often challenging to deliver in an already crowded curriculum.
 - 18 Schools are making full use of their STAR funding through the provision of school-based courses, taster courses, etc. Most schools allow students to apply to go on specific taster courses within the allocated STAR budget.
 - 19 Some schools are running the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme which is a programme of study which teaches students basic life skills in conjunction with their transition classes. ASDAN awards students with a qualification for the successful completion of the course of study.
 - 20 Many schools run community/volunteer service programmes often in conjunction with other programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. While not specifically targeted at gaining employment or knowledge of the work force these volunteer placements can often help educate young

people about the work opportunities that might be available in the community.

- 21 Many schools and principals acknowledge that the traditional academic programme running at schools does not suit many students and this can have flow-on effects in terms of student motivation, discipline, success, etc.

Specific School Programmes Focused on Vocational Education

Targetted Work Experience Programmes – Examples

Kaikorai Valley requires all Year 12 students to do work experience at some time during the year. This is done through their modular studies programme and consists of a minimum of six ½ days per student.

Menzies College requires all students to do a one-week work exploration placement.

Merced High School not only runs traditional work experience type programmes but offers students the chance to have a paid work placement which gains credit towards California graduation requirements. Grading for the work placement is based around an evaluation issued by the employer, attendance and class assignment work. To gain admittance to this programme students must already have a job placement (ie weekend, evening or after school) and have a grade point average of 2.0 (“C” average or higher).

Stand-alone Programmes – Example

Queens High School runs a “Job Track” programme for students aged between 16 and 19. The aim of this programme is to “Create pathways into jobs, training and careers for school leavers and young people looking for direction and motivation in employment opportunities.” Job Track runs outside of the normal school. Students in the programme are not part of the normal curriculum at school but instead are assigned to the Job Track system. The students and staff work and study from a house next to the school. Students study lifeskills, cooking, recreation, work experience and some academic course work combined with extensive job experience and job placement programmes. The aim of the programme is to move students into positive paid employment. Job Track accepts students not only from Queens High School but from other Dunedin secondary schools as well as recommended placements from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Success rates in terms of placements into paid employment are high.

Careers Education Development Programmes – Example

Southland Boys High School is implementing a programme called CPaBL (Creating Pathways and Building Lives). This programme is strategic in focus

with a time frame of 2007 – 2009 and is designed to review the whole school's focus on careers and vocational education. The school intends to look at how careers are taught across all curriculum areas, the gathering of baseline data, staff professional development in careers education, parent and caregiver involvement, option and subject choices, etc.

Academy Programmes - Examples

Taieri College runs a "Trades Academy" for students in years 12 and 13. This covers three option lines in the school timetable with one option line devoted to theory study and the other two option lines devoted to practical work in the automotive and engineering areas. Students complete core requirements during their other time at school.

Merced High School runs an Industrial Trades Academy programme where students spend most of their school day in the workshop. Teachers of core subjects (mathematics, English, etc) come to the workshop to deliver these parts of the curriculum. Although only the second year of the programme student and parent interest is very high. At California Grade 10 (Year 11 in NZ) students are involved in a broad taster programme in the Academy involving the basic of building work, welding, hydraulics and factory maintenance. In Grades 11 and 12 students may stay in the programme and they move on to advanced work and then construction and industrial site placements.

Transition to Work Trust

This Trust provides young people in the age range of 15 – 24 with employment coaching, life coaching, assistance with training and job placement. The Trust notes that numeracy and literacy are key elements for successful job placements for young people. The Trust personnel also emphasised the notion that traditional schooling does not suit many young people especially at the higher ages and that the role of vocational teachers / career counselors, etc is an absolutely vital one in terms of successful transition to work and job placement.

Specific Implications and Ideas for Cromwell College

These ideas are not meant to be a blueprint for future development but rather ideas to consider as the school sets targets, budgets, prepares for roll growth, etc. Some of these are already in place at the College to some degree. Some of these ideas are basic and fundamental and others are new and perhaps more radical.

- 1 Recognition by staff, management and Board of Trustees that careers and vocational training are an essential ingredient of the school's curriculum and that success in these programmes and in associated areas such as job

- placements, apprenticeships and technical training are as meaningful and important as traditional academic success and tertiary study.
- 2 Set specific are targeted goals for achievement in these areas in the same way that goals and targets are set in traditional academic areas.
 - 3 Ensure that publicity in relation to vocational and career oriented programmes is positive and prominent in the school and local media. Keep the school and wider community informed about the success of Cromwell College students both in school-related vocational and careers education and through the charting of the success of students who are leaving or have left the school.
 - 4 Chart and report to the community the destinations of school leavers especially those who move from school into work-based training, apprenticeships, etc.
 - 5 Conduct an audit and curriculum review of the teaching of careers and vocational guidance at the school to ensure that what is taught is current and reflects best practice. Use outside experts not only from other schools but also from the Careers Service to help Cromwell College develop best practice in terms of careers education.
 - 6 Appoint a Board member and member of the school's senior management team to have special oversight of these areas of the schools' curriculum and strategic plan. Consider the formation of a school focus group to help with all areas of vocational and careers education. This group could consist of BOT member, SMT member, careers advisor, etc.
 - 7 Continue with a strategic emphasis on literacy and numeracy.
 - 8 Value the role of the careers advisor, work experience co-ordinator, etc through the provision of additional non-contact time and professional development especially as the school continues to grow.
 - 9 Consider the provision of a dedicated careers/vocational room at the school where students can drop-in, browse resource material, meet with staff, etc. The old Motoring Studies Room could possibly be used for this purpose.
 - 10 Establish the Gateway programme at Cromwell College and work towards ten student placements in the first year. Use the Gateway programme as a positive way of engaging the local business community to become more involved with the school.
 - 11 As well as a focus on NCEA success promote and foster additional qualifications for student achievement such as NQF qualifications in Outdoor Education, Certificate in Employment Skills (CES), Information Technology, International Computer Driver's License, Pitman Examinations, Young Enterprise scheme, ASDAN, etc.

Conclusion

It is promising to see that schools are investing resources and energy into the provision of transition, vocational and careers education. It is also encouraging to see schools developing varied and diverse programmes to encourage a

positive and effective pathway for young people from secondary school into the world of employment and further vocational education.

Schools such as Cromwell College have both advantages and disadvantages in these areas. The small size of the College means that it will always be a challenge to offer an effective senior school curriculum which caters for both the traditional academic programme and a vocationally oriented course of study. Through the effective use of programmes such as Gateway, work experience, careers education and the offering of additional qualifications embedded within the NCEA framework even a small school such as Cromwell College can go a long way towards providing good transition and vocational education to students.

I believe that the implementation and programme strengthening ideas which are detailed in the **Implications** section of this report are worthy of discussion and further consideration at all levels of the school including Board, senior management and staff.