

## Alan Forgie, Principal, Okaihau College

### SABBATICAL REPORT

6 June – 17 August 2015

### Equity in the provision of e-learning opportunities in small rural, and/or lower decile schools.

#### Purpose

Ka whiwhi ia tamaiti te taumata

Every child succeeds

Ka whakanuia e ia whanau

Every whanau celebrates

Ka whakakahatia ia hapori

Every community strengthens

This vision for Okaihau College is the product of several years of debate and discussion, stemming from our early years as part of Te Kotahitanga. As part of our discussions around the provision of e-learning opportunities we return to the question of equity; how do we ensure that **every** child succeeds, **every** whanau celebrates and **every** community strengthens?

#### Our Strategic Plan

##### Goal 2: Improved outcomes for Maori students

- 2.1 To raise Maori students' achievement at all levels
- 2.2 To increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning for Maori students
- 2.3 To develop the links between participation, engagement and achievement

We believe effective use of e-learning is a key to achieving this goal; the key is to ensure that **every** student is able to take advantage of the opportunities offered.

##### Goal 6: To deliver quality teaching at Okaihau College

In 2013 we undertook whole staff training in Teaching as Enquiry, while this was poorly delivered it did again provoke discussion over the pedagogy we developed as part of Te Kotahitanga, the opportunities that e-learning should provide here and again, how do we ensure that **every** student has access.

Michael Fullan, in his latest release, "Stratosphere", writes of '... attempting to integrate good instructional practices with what we call "whole system reform" – the moral purpose of raising the bar and closing the gap for *all* students in the entire ...country.' How do we ensure this?

## **ACKNOWLEDEMENT OF THEIR GENEROSITY**

- Our Board of Trustees and their support for my application.
- Our senior Leadership team, in particular Karen Campbell' who ably fulfilled the role of acting Principal, and others who accepted greater responsibilities in my absence.
- Staff and students of the following schools who gave generously of their time and knowledge: Otaki College; Western Heights High School; Kaitao Intermediate; Otumoetai Intermediate; Papamoa College; Te Puke High School; Hornby High School; Linwood High School, Buller High School and Queen Charlotte College.  
Also, in Australia: Claremont College (Sydney); Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior School (Alice Springs); Kormilda College and Casuarina Senior College (Darwin).

### **DISCLAIMER**

The following comments are not directed at any individual school(s) but are founded on overall impressions, observations and conversations.

### **Finance – some methods**

I observed a variety of models, frequently based on the purchase of Chromebooks by parents/caregivers. Often they are subsidized by a local trust.

In 1 model, schools purchase the Chromebooks from retailers and then on sell them to parents/caregivers on time payment, commonly \$5 per week. Usually students cannot take the device home until it is paid for. There are several fishhooks here: if the family moves and the device is only partly paid for the school now possesses a secondhand device; if the family/caregiver are unable to continue payments does the school impound the device and now possess a secondhand device; insurance of the device may well be an issue; and so on.

In another model schools have facilitated a time payment agreement between parents/caregivers and a finance company, with payment being made through the school. My concern here is around the school's culpability should the family/caregiver default on the payments. Will the fishhooks in model 1 apply here?

A 3<sup>rd</sup> model is simply insist that students have a device, usually a specific model/brand, as part of their stationary. Often there is no attempt to soften the financial impact, although some schools have deals with a local retailer to offer a discounted price to parents/caregivers.

### **Finance – some comments**

The first 2 models appear to be based on the assumption that all families/caregivers can afford \$5 per week for around 2 years. A casual chat with a small number of parents indicates that this is in fact yet another financial burden they struggle to meet, especially when they have more than one child involved. Both models often increase the total price of the device.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> model is quite simply beyond the means of many, particularly when the device specified is top of the range and therefore expensive. The gap widens.

## **BYOD**

There are a wide variety of 'schemes' and indeed a wide variety of devices in some schools. The most common I have observed is for the school to provide a recommendation re the capacity the device should have – this is particularly important for senior students. Obviously the higher the performance required the more expensive the device and we revisit the equity issue.

## **Some Suggestions/Comments**

- The best practice observed was where the focus was on the device as an aid to learning, often in conjunction other devices such as books and pens, not on using the device because students had them. In the worst example I observed, the teacher was at the front of the room and the students were working on their Chromebooks which were basically being used as a combination textbook and exercise book; many were off task with several being unsure what their task was.
- Sharing devices between 2 or 3 students was common as a means of overcoming the need for 1 device for every student as well as, perhaps more importantly, providing a focus on co-operative learning.
- Many schools are endeavoring to provide as large a number of devices as possible – in 1 case the school had 600 devices for around 900 students. Is this financially viable in the long term?

## **CONCLUSION**

*The New Zealand Herald* recently featured 3 articles on inequality in New Zealand and examined the connection between poverty and under achievement in our schools. Minister Parata stated in Parliament that poverty is a small factor in educational underachievement although the research indicates it is indeed a major factor. My fear is that the increasing emphasis on e-learning and NZQA's drive towards online assessment will further widen the achievement gap between the haves and the have-nots; that the educational 'tail' will grow even longer.