

Sabbatical Report

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Acknowledgements

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The TeachNZ Principals sabbatical is for 10 weeks and for various reasons I took this sabbatical in two parts.

Part A (Weeks 7 – 10 Term One 2015)

- Visiting a range of NZ Co-Ed and Boys schools to discuss what strategies and techniques they found effective in raising achievement in boys.
- Professional reading and reflection on strategies and techniques in regards to Boys' Education.

Part B (Weeks 2 – 7 Term Three 2015)

- Attended World Principals Conference Helsinki, Finland.
- Further professional reading and reflection on educational issues in a broader sense.

The opportunity to take a sabbatical this year was a wonderful opportunity for me professionally. In my first seven years at Karamu the school has been a vibrant and exciting place to work and the school has been involved in a number of significant initiatives.

With the completion of the major building project and the improvement in key achievement indicators for students, it was a good time to reflect on strategic goals for the school for the next five years. This also coincides with the consultation and drafting of the next school charter for the 2016 – 2020 period.

A summary of the key findings from my sabbatical are as follows:

- Both Boys and Co-Educational schools reported that significant improvement occurred in boys learning when staff acknowledged that boys have particular learning needs that have to be catered for.
- Whether the teacher is male or female is largely irrelevant. What is relevant is the understanding by staff members of strategies and techniques that boys respond to.

- One mid-decile boys school found better transition for boys into the school at Year 9 if they grouped their boy with poor literacy and numeracy skills into one class and had one teacher deliver Year 9 English and Social Studies and another teacher deliver Science and Mathematics. Apart from Science, the other lessons were taught in the same classroom to provide a much more settled transition into secondary school.
- Principals at both Boys and Co-Ed schools that I visited readily acknowledged that boys liked teachers that were demanding (strict) but did not like to publicly articulate this.
- Boys have a deep sense of fairness (rules) in teachers conduct and classroom management. One Principal of a Co-Ed school described how boys categorised teachers at his school as either “nice strict” or “mean strict” to illustrate how boys felt about it.
- Boys are motivated by competition but when it comes to academic competition they will avoid being humiliated at any cost. Learning environments where boys feel safe to take risks are vital.
- A major difference between Co-Ed and Boys schools is in addressing NCEA assessments. In boys schools they are aware that boys do not seem to enjoy continuous assessment all year via internal assessment. They constantly look to alter programmes to have less internal assessment or move to qualifications like Cambridge. It seems that these schools are happy to accept this trait in boys and are trying to tailor the assessment programme to suit it. The demands of high stakes extra-curricular activities further adds to this trait.
- In contrast I found that the Co-Ed schools I visited were much more progressive in getting boys to shift their habits to be more aligned with continuous assessment courses. Like Karamu, two co-ed schools I visited used forms of mile stoning to keep their boys (and obviously their girls) on track and meeting deadlines. These schools also had homework clubs (pass classes) operating further to support boys but these are only effective if boys are formally requested to attend and parents are informed.
- I have certainly formed the opinion that the approach in terms of courses and their assessment programmes that are continuous are much better preparation for boys who go on to employment or tertiary studies.
- To improve reading and writing in boys it is vital that teachers are aware that boy friendly context are vital.
- All schools I visited spoke of the mentoring of boys in some way by senior students. In the main this mentoring tended to be socially. I feel there is little exploration of schools getting positive male students as academic role models and mentoring students in academic context.

WORLD PRINCIPAL’S CONFERENCE – Helsinki Finland

It was a privilege to attend the World Principals’ Conference in Helsinki, Finland. 1200 principals from over twenty five countries attended the Conference. The vast majority of the Conference was delivered in English and the odd presentation that wasn’t had translators.

The theme of the Conference was Leading Education Design and the four days consisted of a range of keynote addresses and workshop around this theme.

Many of the keynote speakers were from Finland and explained a key component of the Finnish educational system.

The Finish Education System is widely regarded as best in the world by the PISA assessment and has been number one since 2003. It was interesting to identify parts of the New Zealand education system similar to Finland e.g. a significant emphasis on engagement in early childhood education.

Equity in the Finish school system is a strong feature, there is enormous consistency in Finish schools. This means that students attend the closest school to their home which in the vast majority of cases is a state co-ed school.

Qualifications for teachers in all sectors is significantly greater than New Zealand. To enter the teaching service you require a Master's Degree in a particular area of Education/Subject. To advance to Senior Leadership in schools you require a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and Administration.

Helsinki Secondary Schools have developed two clear pathways of progression. One is an Academic Pathway leading to University study while the other is called a Vocational Pathway which leads to training in Polytechnic Institutions or the workplace. The recent developments in New Zealand are strikingly similar to Finland.

I attended a workshop on the administration of the Finish education where the Director of Education (equivalent to our Minister of Education) explained how education is devolved in Finland. This involves the Ministry of Education delegating responsibility to each cities/region's Council (equivalent to the Hastings District Council) the responsibility for managing the resources and achievements of schools under their jurisdiction. If you can appreciate this means that the HDC would have an Education Division within its organisation. There is certainly a strong feeling of local ownership of their Educational System.

Auditing and review of schools does not rely on an external agency e.g. ERO and this is countered by rigorous and comprehensive internal appraisal systems.

I attended a workshop on Sino-Finland relationships. All the presenters were from China and explained how they were making use of sister school relationships to strengthen their practice in Chinese schools. This gave me a good insight into how these relationships can be developed between schools from different countries. The delegates from China made it very clear that they were seeking partnerships all around the world and they had considerable resources to devote to it.

One of the best keynotes was from Pasi Sahlberg the most widely regarded educationist in Finland who spoke at great length about what he calls the "Hidden Features" of a successful Education System. This would be quite controversial in New Zealand at the moment as he quite strongly advocated more teaching and less assessment which is currently the practice in Finland. Students are only formally judged on Academic Qualifications as they near the end of their secondary schooling and similar to the UK they only study three or four subjects in their last year but obviously at a greater depth.

An American called Andrew Cole presented on behalf of the Wallace Foundation a huge organisation in America that funds educational leadership. His main assertion is that

principals were key to retaining good teachers in schools. He also presented findings on the most effective principals were ones that built a sustainable model of leadership in their schools. One of his key findings was the analysis of principals who had grown the capacity of a colleague to become a Principal who had in turn done the same thing. The qualities of a Principal who has achieved this he feels are highly valued.

There were both formal and informal social events which were very interesting mainly because of the diversity of countries represented in any discussion. At our table at the Conference Dinner, there were Principals from Finland, Australia, Kenya and Uganda. The Principal from Uganda described to me quite a unique situation that existed in his 1000 pupil Co-Ed boarding school which made me realise how lucky we are in New Zealand.

As you can appreciate I have had an amazing experience in being granted this principals sabbatical and I certainly gained significantly professionally from it.

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