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ROTORUA LAKES HIGH SCHOOL**

SABBATICAL REPORT 29/6/15 – 18/9/15

“To attend a conference on School Leadership & Building Learning Communities, to consider secondary tertiary links to ease transitions for students and explore future orientated curriculums”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Board of Trustees Rotorua Lakes High School
- Senior Management Team Rotorua Lakes High School. In particular Ms Jo Sturme who accepted the role of Acting Principal while I was on my sabbatical, Mrs Pani McLean who stepped into the Deputy Principal Role. Both women fulfilled their roles superbly and I thank them.
- Professor Margaret Noble, Chief Executive, Waiariki Institute of Technology, who offered advice and contacts to visit in Britain for my investigation into Secondary/Tertiary links.
- The Management team at Waitaki Girls in Oamaru who willingly gave up their time to speak with me.
- Margaret Malcon – Leadership & Assessment Facilitator. Te Toi Tupu. Institute of Professional Learning The University of Waikato.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Rotorua Lakes High School our school vision is centered around the concept that “we are learner centered” and “will provide excellent education opportunities to all students”. We are using teacher inquiry with the parameters being around to “improve learning outcomes for my students.”

In 2015 my own inquiry is to ‘facilitate the spread of Distributed Leadership within the school, in order to embed pedagogical, administrative and relationship change(s) which will foster student achievement”.

PURPOSE OF MY SABBATICAL

- “To attend a conference on school leadership and building learning communities”.
- To consider secondary / tertiary links to ease transitions for students.
- To explore future orientated curriculums.

Once I started the planning I realised this was too broad and that I had financially and time-wise committed myself to a conference in Boston in July and then to visiting secondary and tertiary institutions in London in August / September. This was too intensive an undertaking from a financial point of view for our precious school funds as well as being too many questions for an ageing mind to juggle!

My 2015 teacher inquiry around distributing leadership opportunities across the school in order to encourage real change that will foster student achievement led me to decide to attend the Building Learning Communities Educational Conference 2015 in Boston, USA as several of the sessions dealt with leadership in the educational context.

BACKGROUND

Through my professional reading and personal inquiry during the first half of 2015 I was increasingly becoming aware that successfully distributing leadership within our school setting is essential in order to implement and facilitate the inquiry process at a teacher level. In 2014 and 2015 we released our 7 core HOD's (English, Maths, Social Sciences, Technology, Maori, Science and P.E) for 2 days per term in order to share and learn from each other about implementing an "inquiry disposition" (ERO 2011) where teachers view teaching and learning through an inquiry lens.

We used a Leadership & Assessment Facilitator from Te Toi, Tupu, Institute of Professional Learning at University of Waikato to meet with this group of middle leaders for a day per term to give feedback, feed forward and offer research-based expertise to validate their actions.

METHODOLOGY

I registered for the Building Learning Communities Educational Conference in Boston in July 2015 in order to attend keynote sessions around leadership and change management, and also to network with other conference participants, all involved in education from around the world.

The 4 sessions I attended as keynote addresses in the morning followed by interactive, small group tutorials each afternoon were:-

1. **Project Based Learning (PBL)** run by Mike Gorman, Director of Professional Development, Southwest Allen County Schools, looking at how PBL can be the process and pedagogy for multiple initiatives including student centered learning.
2. **Leadership Coaching to Foster a Technology Rich Growth Culture** by Susanna Garza. These sessions examined using coaching to craft and communicate a vision for learning inquiry and managing change. A big focus was the need to foster distributed leadership practices to remove barriers in achieving an espoused target. A major

point stressed was that the leader / principal can often be the number 1 obstacle to implementing meaningful change as he/she attempts to do everything themselves instead of enabling/empowering others to drive and implement targets / change throughout the organisation so the new target / vision becomes “the way we do things here”.

3. **Model Makers – Getting to the Heavy Lifting of Professional Learning** by Sara Wilkie. These sessions dealt with reconsidering professional learning design by examining the critical role of learning leaders in growing a vibrant growth-focused culture and ensuring the buy-in of stakeholders.

4. **Leadership: Managing the Transition** by Alan November. These sessions discussed designing staff development programmes and the importance of leaders articulating the vision / target and managing the change process utilising areas such as teacher inquiry and distributed leadership. November’s main point is that when staff are fully involved and engaged, they more readily embrace challenges, take risks, and collaborate for more significant results.

In August, I visited Waitaki Girls’ in Oamaru to talk with the Leadership team about their journey to facilitate teacher inquiry becoming an integral part of how “things” work at their school.

FINDINGS

Listening to the conference speakers and networking with other teachers and principals at the conference reiterated for me how essential it is to continually monitor and review progress towards a target or vision. This links in closely with the requirement of constant and robust teacher inquiry linked to student achievement.

When distributing leadership staff must not be left with the feeling of being “dumped-on” and given more work for the same pay! As Principal I need to model how distributed leadership works and show the value placed on the work and ideas of middle managers and classroom teachers.

A central idea that came through from most people I discussed this with at the conference was that staff need ongoing paid time to plan and implement for change and so therefore meetings etc. cannot just be after school. This supports our approach of giving our core HOD's 2 days per term to meet and work together. At Waitaki Girls we discussed giving designated staff development time e.g. a regular Monday after school full staff PD meeting slot, for HOD's to use at their discretion for individual or departmental conversations about inquiry.

My experiences and professional conversations at the Boston Conference as well as having time at Waitaki Girls have reinforced for me the importance of my being a member of Principal Professional Learning Groups as this gives me the opportunities and time to have professional discussions with fellow principals who can challenge and extend my thinking.

In 2015 our school alongside 3 local primary schools, and an intermediate joined the Ministry's Community of Schools initiative. I can see a lot of opportunities to encourage distributed leadership opportunities and teacher inquiry through our being part of a community of schools.

CONCLUSION

A huge thank you to staff and Board at RLHS and the Ministry's principal sabbatical initiative. After eight years as Principal I did not realise how refreshing and rewarding a term away from the day to day life of being Principal would be.

I had time to inquire and reflect. I received validation as well as feed forward for some of the things I was doing as Principal. This is invaluable.