Secondary to Tertiary Transition

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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Supporting learners' in their transition to tertiary learning environments is a key role of secondary teachers.   Providing more opportunities for secondary teachers and their tertiary colleagues to meet to discuss and collaborate will:

- support the exploration and adoption of pedagogies that aid learners successful transition to tertiary learning environments
- aid in the development of 'next practice' secondary-tertiary models where learners move seamlessly between the different sectors

Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical inquiry was two-fold:

- to investigate the pedagogies, practices and models that support students successful transition to tertiary learning environments
- to investigate 'next practice' for secondary – tertiary partnerships

Rationale and Background

National Administration Guideline 1 (f) states that *'Each board, through the principal and staff, is required to: provide appropriate career education and guidance for all students in year 7 and above, with a particular emphasis on specific career guidance for those students who have been identified by the school as being at risk of leaving school unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training'*.

It is recognised that a tertiary education means a wider range of life choices for young people and that a skilled workforce supports economic growth (Galliott et al., 2015; State Services Commission, 2016).

The current Government has introduced a number of initiatives under the umbrella of Youth Guarantee Initiatives to improve transition to the workplace or further education / training. Trades Academies, such as the Top of the South Trades Academy, of which Marlborough Girls' College is a partner, have added to the complexity of the programmes offered that aid transition to further education / training (Fig 1).
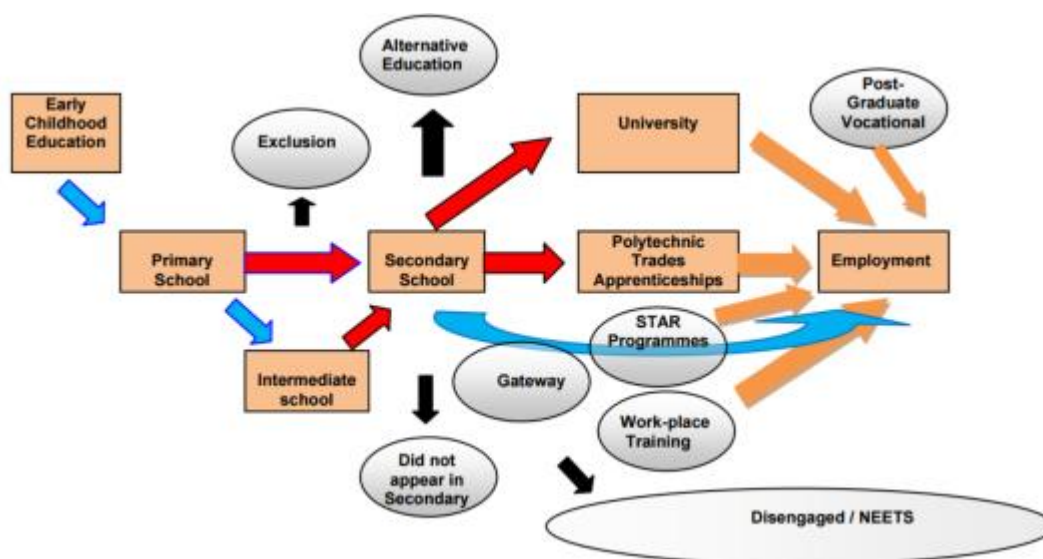

Fig 1: Increasing Complexity in the Supplementary Programmes Offered (Middleton, 2011, p. 6)

As stated in the Report of the Secondary-Tertiary Interface Taskforce, 'one of the benefits of trade academies and the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) was that they 'blurred the boundaries'; between secondary and tertiary and gave students experience of a tertiary environment while still at school (PPTA, 2014, p.10).

The co-location of Blenheim's two single sex colleges on a greenfield site by 2021 has provided a further opportunity for MGC, Marlborough Boys' College (MBC) and Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) to explore how collaboration and curriculum alignment can inform the development of 'next pedagogies', innovative programmes of learning and shared facilities. The Piritahi Communities of Schools, of which MGC is a member, envision that in the future we will work collaboratively with our colleagues in the tertiary sector with a view to increasing the number of learners enrolling in tertiary education and ensuring their successful transition.

As teachers, we know that the transition to tertiary study can be an anxious time for learners. There is also regional and national concern that not all young people who enrol in tertiary study

successfully transition and go on to complete a tertiary qualification. New Zealand, in fact, 'has one of the lowest higher education qualification completion rates in the OECD' (Speedy, 2016). Research continues to raise questions regarding the preparation of students for tertiary study, particularly of priority learners (Callister et al, 2006; Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways, 2011; Hilman, 2005; McCarthy, 2002; PPTA, 2014).

Methodology

A wide range of readings informed the development of a survey of MGC's teaching staff. This survey was designed to develop an understanding of how their educational histories have influenced the pedagogies they use in preparing students for tertiary study.

Visits were organised to schools in Auckland, Christchurch and Melbourne. Four of these visits as part of attendance at the 2016 Association of Learning Environments Conference.

Interviews were also undertaken with colleagues in the tertiary sector representing both Polytechnic and university voice.

Findings

In discussing transition, we also need to recognise that the secondary – tertiary interface is changing rapidly as is the transition to tertiary. Back in 2007, Franklin and McCulloch in their book '*The Death of the Comprehensive High School?*' asked if the existing models of secondary schooling adequately prepared learners for the world of tomorrow? They argued that rather than pursuing the traditional model of "academic" and "vocational" pathways, schools should adopt the multiple pathways approach. This approach having four essential components:

1. An academic core curriculum that provides opportunities for learners to attain university entrance
2. A vocational core based on both academic and real-life standards
3. Work experience
4. Additional support to meet identified needs such as financial assistance for transport and workplace equipment / clothing needs, pastoral support

At Marlborough Girls' College we have addressed the transition between secondary and postsecondary education, by adopting the multiple pathways approach that allow learners to concurrently study in the secondary and tertiary sectors. In addition to well-established vocational courses such as childcare, hairdressing, outdoor education/tourism, STAR, Gateway, and Trades Academy programmes have added further choice for learners.

This sabbatical provided the time to visit other schools with a view to informing the 2017 development of our vision for learning for the new co-located school. The proposed West Auckland Senior College and the Catholic Regional College providing an opportunity to explore specialist schools within schools. In comparison, the Australian Industry Trades School is developing radical new structures to meet both learner and industry need. The College has developed a unique curriculum which provides the opportunity for young people to complete their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) over two years in five-week school based blocks. Following an in-school pre-apprenticeship training program learners commence their trade career by going out on work placement – these structured 40 hours seven week blocks of work experience culminate in selection by an employer as a paid apprentice or trainee. Then individualised programmes cater for learners who are studying for their QCE, working towards their apprenticeship by attending the local TAFE or studying online; and

working in paid employment for seven-week blocks (or alternatively one day a week if that best suits the business owner).   A very different and successful model where young people were successfully completing their secondary education while working full time for periods of time and undertaking tertiary study.

A complex mix of individual, institutional and external influences impact on learners as they transition to tertiary. As Madjar et al. (2010, p 31) state 'at its heart it is about growth, learning and self-transformation' of the individual. Research indicates that learner's transition experience and tertiary achievement is positively related to personality characteristics such as work ethic, their ownership and commitment to well-articulated goals; a supportive family environment who have high aspirations, the early planning of a coherent learning programme related to their intended tertiary pathway, and a successful academic record.

'Schools play a critical role in the academic and social preparation of learners', particularly for those students whose families have no tertiary experience (Madjar et al, 2010, pg 7). From year nine it is crucial that schools work with learners and their families / whānau /aiga (fig 2) to develop academic goals, how to select subjects, to consider a wide range of tertiary / training pathways and finally in developing realistic expectations of what to expect when transitioning to, and studying in, a tertiary environment (Chauvel et al, 2012; Madjar et al., 2010). Key in this work is exploring different ways to engage the different cultural and socio-economic groups within our school communities and put in place role models / mentors with tertiary backgrounds to support learner's understanding. The role of schools and these academic mentors is particularly important over the summer months for those students who lack clear academic goals, who are less confident of their fulltime tertiary readiness and lack family support to attend to the necessary tasks within the tertiary institution's timeframes. (Madjar et al., 2010).
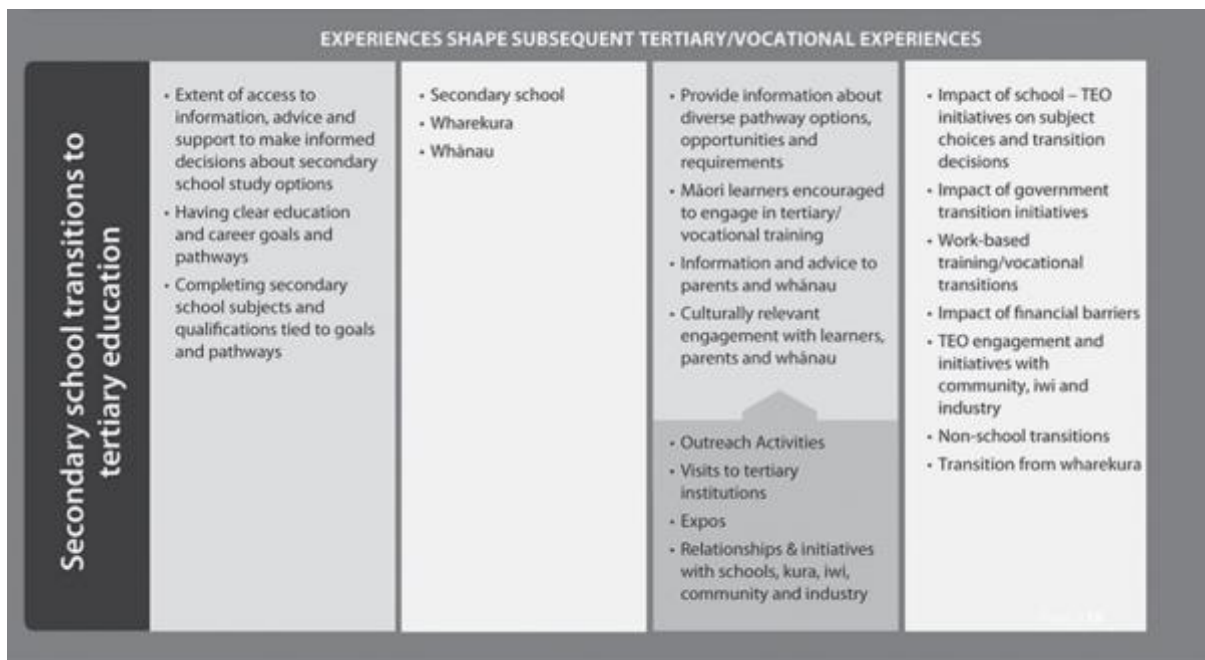

Fig. 2: Secondary Transition to Tertiary Education (Chauvel and Rean, 2012, p. 19)

The academic rigour and challenge of learning programmes is also crucial. Research has shown that secondary students who achieve high grades are more successful in their first year of fulltime tertiary study than students who have achieved a high number of credits at an achieved level (Shulruf, Hattie and Tumen, 2008 as cited in Madjar et al., 2010). Further, for those students

planning to study at university, Madjar et al., (2010, p 91) argue that 'students who opt for and succeed in a significant number of external assessments in their final year of NCEA are better prepared for university assessments that in the first year invariably involve examinations'.

Research has also shown that factors such as the ubiquity of information, the increased use of blended and online learning means that transition to tertiary for today's learners is vastly more complex than that faced by their teachers (Barber et al, 2013; Larmer and Lodge, 2014). Transition is best thought of as the period in which a learner develops tertiary readiness and where the educational focus changes from academic disciplines to understanding the specific knowledge and competencies that are required to succeed at tertiary (Middleton 2011).

Researchers have called for increased attention to be paid to the role that schools can play. In particular - Tertiary readiness (Fig 3) - that is, the knowledge and competencies which learners need in order to succeed in further education / training.

Tertiary Readiness = an independent learner with the ability and confidence to use a range of competencies and skills in a range of academic domains and problem-solving contexts		
Competencies	Academic literacy	- Reading - Writing e.g. The ability to write a sustained argument / analysis, of 1200 words or more - Technical skills for academic writing e.g. referencing
	Conceptual / Critical Thinking -	- formulate / refine research questions - analysis - comparison - inference and interpretation - evaluation, and synthesis
	Digital Literacy	- Search skills e.g. Boolean search strategies - Using and acknowledging the intellectual property of others by adhering to copyright and creative commons - Presenting information clearly and convincingly using a range of tools /media
	Information literacy	- being able to locate, understand and use primary texts and information from a range of sources / media effectively - Understanding different source formats and evaluating sources as fit for purpose
	Learning to learn / Work ethic	- Self-motivated - Ready for learning - Able to prioritise / use time effectively - Reflective
	Oral literacy	

Fig 3: Tertiary Readiness (Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways, 2011; Emerson et al, 2015; Larmer and Lodge, 2014; Madjar et al., 2010; Owen 2012).

Successful transition is enabled where the school culture is one where learners are taught to, and set for themselves, academic goals; and where teachers have high academic expectations of their students. Schools also need to identify and target learners with academic potential. Schools can extend gifted learners in preparation for tertiary by providing opportunities such as accelerated NCEA progression and concurrent university study. To support 'at-risk' students (priority learners

and students with changing family situations) by prioritising the development of the competencies they need to achieve academically, and growing their confidence and resilience. Being helped to identify and apply scholarships for tertiary study also aids successful transition to fulltime study (Starpath Project, 2010).

Teachers not only need to know about the entry requirements for tertiary study / courses, they also need to ensure that they adopt pedagogies that will support their leaners as they transition to tertiary learning environments (Hong et al, 2009; Madjar et al., 2010, Thomas et al., 2009, Whannell and Whannell, 2015). This is key as the research shows that Teachers make assumptions about tertiary pedagogies, learning and assessment programmes 'based on their own (often nostalgic) memories of university' (Emerson et al.,2014, pg 8).

Secondary teachers understanding the thinking behind the development of tertiary learning programmes can only benefit their learners. The model presented in Figure 4 shows how the design of tertiary learning programmes builds on:

- learners' experiences,
- incorporates pedagogies that focus on the development of competencies; and
- provides follow-up tasks that provide learners with the opportunity "to engage with the curriculum in a way where they meaningfully experience the process of accumulating new knowledge, reflect on the thinking processes that serve to integrate new information with their prior understandings, evaluate the impact of their cognitive processes on their learning and either continue to adopt processes that build metacognitive capital or replace strategies to do not serve to facilitate lifelong learning" (Barnett and Coate, 2005, pg 24 as cited in Larmer and Lodge, 2014, pg 101).
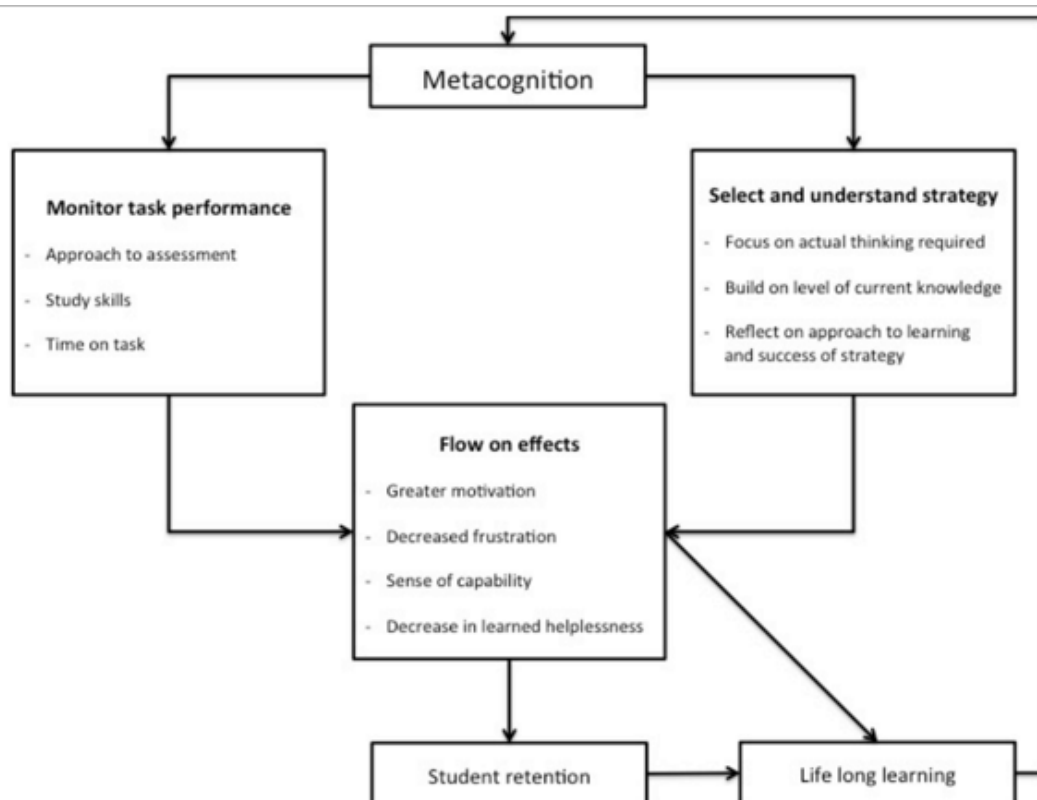

Fig 4: Dual Pathway model for enhancing metacognitive capital in commencing university students (Larmer and Lodge, 2014, pg 100)

Emerson et al., (2014, 2015) argue that academic literacy is at the centre of both the transition that learners make, and at the centre of the pedagogical shift that both the secondary teachers and tertiary lecturers / tutors need to make. Their model below (Fig 5) provides a literacy framework that secondary and tertiary teachers can use to share and evaluate their curriculums, pedagogical practices and teaching resources with a view to supporting students in this crucial transition.
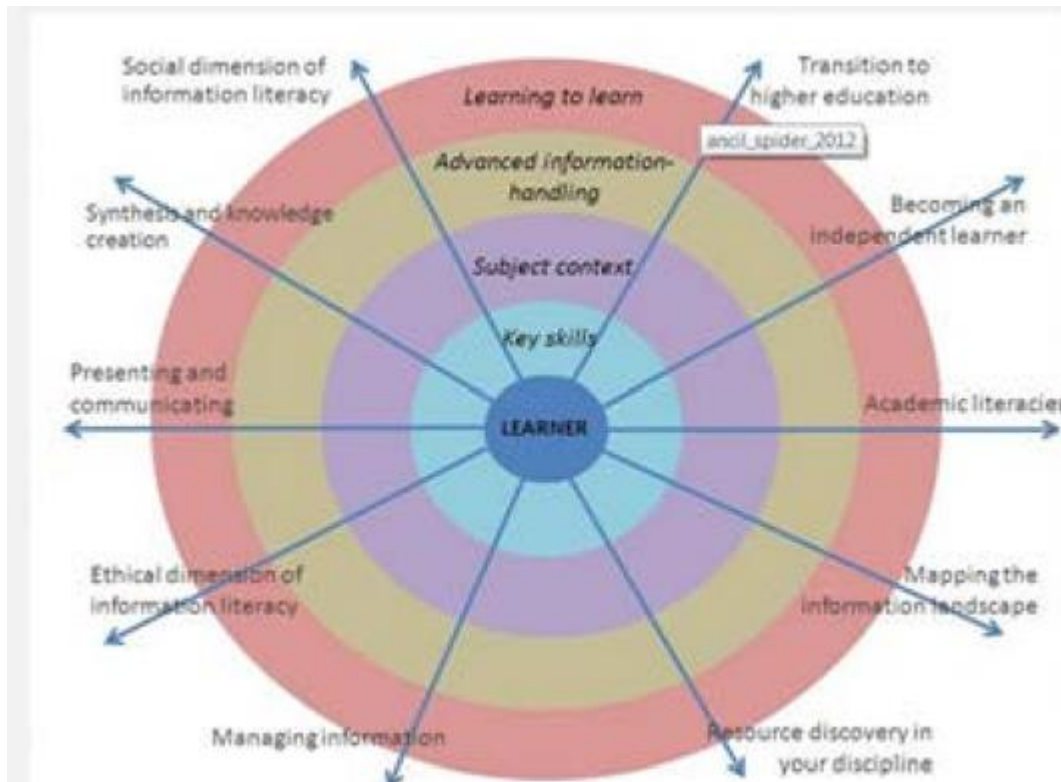

Fig 5: ANCIL Framework (Secker and Coonan, 2013 as cited in Emerson et al, 2015, pg 7)

Time and further discussion is needed to explore this research / thinking. However, what is clear from the research, is that we as educational leaders need to provide more opportunities for secondary teachers and tertiary lecturers / tutors to engage in the professional conversations about pedagogical practice and learning programmes, to build professional collaborations with a view to supporting learners as they transition from secondary school to tertiary learning environments (Emerson et al, 2015; Hong et al, 2009; Thomas et al, 2010; Wenden, 2015).

Implications

There are a number of questions from this sabbatical that will need to be addressed by Marlborough Girls College's middle and senior leaders.

1. How effective are we identifying those students who are 'at risk' – at risk of dropping out over the Christmas break or in their first year?
2. Who in our community would make effective mentors? What induction programme is required?
3. How do we work with our tertiary providers to effectively support 'at risk' learners in the period between when they leave secondary school and start attending a tertiary programme?

Secondly, how do we effectively use the opportunities afforded by the Community of Learning to further develop partnerships with our tertiary colleagues? While we currently collaborate with NMIT and MBC for example as members of the Top of the South Trades Academy, working collaboratively as teachers, as members of a learning community would provide opportunities to move beyond conversation about curriculum alignment to working collaboratively on shared 'spirals of inquiry', focusing on supporting learners as they transition to tertiary. Enabling us to assess where we are making a positive change in terms of progression to tertiary and tertiary achievement. The model used with the Marlborough Kindergarten Association provides a model – a lead tertiary teacher(s) identified to join the Piritahi Across School Lead Teachers in their work with an initial focus providing opportunities for secondary and tertiary teachers to visit / work in each other's learning spaces and to share their literacy focused inquiries.

Finally, how do we use the opportunities provided by co-location to provide 'seamless' opportunities for students to concurrently study secondary and tertiary courses without missing classes as is currently the case. The Australian Industry Trades School provides a model that could enable us to meet the needs of learners and accommodate the demands of the local industry who are looking for skilled workers in a very wide range of trades.

Conclusions

'Where to from here?' is a question that we as a community will address over the next five years. We are in a unique position and it is how we best leverage the opportunities described on page 2 to meet the needs of our range of learners that drives our work moving forward.

The big questions that we must ask ourselves as educational leaders are - is continuing to adapt the current structures best meeting the needs of our learners or do we need to radically rework the secondary – tertiary interface in terms of both the location and timing of both teaching and learning? How can we leverage the opportunities provided by a co-located campus, a committed tertiary partner to provide new educational pathways for our learners while also retain young people in our community and meet the needs of local businesses and industries?

Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora ai te iwi

With your basket and my basket, the people will live

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