

SABBATICAL REPORT TERM 3 2006

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Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Ministry of Education in making this scheme available to Principals. In addition, I wish to thank the St Kevin's College Board of Trustees for supporting and assisting my Sabbatical Leave.

Executive Summary

During the ten week sabbatical period. I visited a variety of school's (state, independent and Catholic) in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and England. Whilst I was particularly interested in ICT, transitioning from primary to secondary school and special character. I also took the opportunity to visit boarding hostels where these were present.

Purpose

I focused on the following key areas:-

1. ICT – Investigate strategies for cross-curricular implementation.
2. Transition issues – How can schools smooth the path for students transitioning from primary to secondary schools?
3. Special Character – Examine effective strategies for implementing initiatives developed in the Edmund Rice tradition.

Background

The background to selecting these key focus areas was as follows:

1. ICT

St Kevin's is the lead school in the ICT PD Waitaki Secondary Schools' Cluster which has been running since 2004. As we approach the end of the 3 year contract I wanted to look specifically at cross-curricular strategies with a view to charting the future directions of ICT development at St Kevin's following completion of the contract.

2. Transition Issues

The challenge of smoothing the path for students moving from primary to secondary school is one faced by all secondary schools to some extent. St Kevin's is a boarding/day school and draws it's students from schools from all around the South Island. (31 in 2006). With this in mind, I wanted to investigate ways of meeting the specific needs of our Yr 9 students which arise from the diverse nature of our intake.

3. Special Character

For well over a century, Christian Brothers' have ministered in Catholic Schools across Australia and New Zealand including St Kevin's College, Oamaru. Edmund Rice is honoured as the Founder of the Christian Brothers and the school proprietor has directed that St Kevin's is to become a school in the Edmund Rice tradition.

As part of this re-branding exercise, I wanted to visit Christian Brothers Schools in Australia who had already been through the process of becoming schools in the tradition of Edmund Rice. I also visited Edmund Rice's birthplace in Callan, Ireland, as well as the community at Waterford where he set up his school and founded the Brothers.

Activities and Methodology

The outline of the Sabbatical Programme was as follows:

1. Developmental Phase

This included professional reading, reflection and formalisation of methodology along with planning and finalising detailed arrangements to visit eleven different schools.

2. Implementation Phase

- A variety of schools were visited including state, integrated and independent across four different countries. Day and day/boarding schools Y7-13, & Y1-Y12 and Y9-13 were among the range of schools visited.

- Discussions had already been held with the schools prior to my visit on the areas upon which I wanted to focus. For each visit a range of questions was prepared related to each of the focus areas.

- Essentially, I was able to conduct a series of professional conversations with members of staff in each school visited. In so doing it became clear that this was mutually beneficial to both parties as we both shared and gained valuable information. The goodwill of the schools and the enthusiasm and passion displayed by the staff members I had the pleasure to meet was most gratifying.

- A visit accounted for almost a full school day in most cases which included a tour of the school and boarding hostel when applicable. I kept a journal of each of my visits and any notes were supplemented by a large number of digital photographs. Considerable documentation was given to me which included prospectus, magazines, course booklets, strategic plan, charter, special programmes etc.

Findings

1. ICT

From the observations I made after visiting the eleven schools, the approaches to ICT were, not surprisingly, many and varied. All schools, however were grappling with the issue of how best to provide ICT support for students and staff. In terms of successful and innovative programmes using ICT, the key factors that determined success or otherwise were as follows:-

- resourcing e.g. lap tops, data projectors, suites, pods, smart boards etc.
- staff training/willingness/confidence
- staff support e.g. technician, help desk, data-base manager

- support from Senior Management/BOT/Community.

Another trend that I found interesting was that in the majority of schools ICT, Computer Studies and TIM were options only and some schools didn't offer any of these at all. Rather, the preferred approach was to integrate ICT across the curriculum, particularly at Y9 & 10. Where integration was the norm, the challenge for schools was how to ensure exposure for the students across the different curriculum areas. The best way to achieve this was to prescribe what ICT skills/programmes etc would be covered and where.

Examples of prescribed ICT Integration were as follows:

Mathematics - Excel
Social Studies - Publisher, Movie-maker
Science - Web-page design
English - Film-clips, word
Health - Power-point

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

One of the difficulties of ICT infrastructure development in New Zealand schools has been the lack of robust and tested models. Charles Newton, Principal of Nayland College and Loop Project Co-ordinator believes we now have a model for that next big step up in ICT.

'The Loop' is a new approach to networks that is being trialled in the Nelson area, linking 12 schools. It is a high speed fibre-optic network that will deliver the internet, internet services and educational resources.

'The Loop' will make a set of fast and affordable broadband-based services available including data storage, remote access for teachers and students, voice over IP, audio and video conferencing, multi-media services, video streaming and much more.

The Ministry of Education and Network Tasman jointly funded 'The Loop's' first Stage and the next step is to evaluate the proof of concept and start work on the business end for a full regional implementation.

2. Transition Issues

All schools visited had developed a number of strategies they used to help smooth the path from primary to secondary schools for its Y9 intake.

While it was acknowledged that one of the main priorities for schools was to ensure ongoing academic progress for students, most schools commented that the transition from primary to secondary school was more about social interaction.

The following strategies/programmes were observed:

- Principal's of the contributing schools invited to the secondary school to meet and discuss transition issues with the Principal and Yr 9 Dean i.e. What can we do better?.

- Y9 Dean visit to contributing schools the previous year to discuss students with current teachers. (Written reports also used).
- Orientation visits by the students/parents to the secondary school the previous year.
- “Getting to Know You” Camp at the beginning of the school year.
- At Y9 level, each class has the same teacher for at least three different subjects.
- Senior students mentor younger students. E.g. Big Brother/Sister Programme
- Pastoral Care System linked to School House System. e.g. Vertical House/Tutor Groups were operating in all but two of the schools visited.
- Three different types of assemblies i.e. College Assembly, Year Level Assembly, House Assembly.
- Participation in school sport compulsory/encouraged e.g. Saturday sport
- Strong House System.
- Yr9 Orientation/Induction Programmes e.g. Student Formation Programme.
- A Parent’s Group for each Year level to plan events for specific year level as opposed to a Parent Teachers Association (PTA) for the whole school.
- Counsellor (Mentor) for each year level. Counsellor’s selected from retired staff members, employed on a P/T basis.
- Organised Weekend Programme for boarding students.

3. Special Character

Edmund Rice founded schools for the poverty-stricken and marginalised in society and in keeping with this tradition, schools that subscribe to this philosophy today are expected to offer a number of service and outreach programmes in their schools/communities.

It was pleasing to see that the majority of schools visited did actively promote some form of service to their community. What are characteristics of an Edmund Rice School?

The following initiatives/programmes were observed.

- Publication of a Charter that identified the distinctive cultural characteristics of Australian Catholic Schools that subscribe to the Edmund Rice tradition.
- Professional Development for staff specific to Edmund Rice.
- Service and Social Justice opportunities, e.g. Placements in nursing homes, IHC,
- Refugee centres. ‘Big Breaky Programme’ – BBQ breakfast for the homeless.
- Immersion Programmes for students and staff. E.g. Philippines, India, South Africa.
- Equity Programme for indigenous peoples.
- Student Mission Committee.
- Symbolism e.g. statues, banners, named buildings.
- Special Projects e.g. construction of orphanage in South Africa.

Conclusion

After 27 years in the teaching profession, including 16 years as a Principal, I found the Sabbatical experience extremely valuable from both professional and personal perspectives.

I applaud the Ministry of Education for making it possible and would recommend that the Ministry work at modifying the current criteria for teaching staff in order to make Sabbaticals more accessible than they are at present.

I have always been a firm believer in what I call “the shared wisdom model” and after visiting eleven different schools across four countries, I am now of the firm opinion that the sharing of good practice among colleagues is the most effective and efficient method for delivering quality professional development to Principals.

I am grateful to the individuals who were so willing and responsive to any requests. I found the school visits stimulating, challenging and affirming.

Schools visited included:

- St Joseph’s College – Melbourne
- St Kevin’s College – Melbourne
- St Joseph’s College – Brisbane
- St Peter’s School – Cambridge
- Aquinas College – Tauranga
- Garin College – Nelson
- Nayland College – Nelson
- Blackrock College – Dublin
- Prior Park College – Bath
- St Augustines College – Trowbridge
- St Peter’s College – Gloucester.

