REFLECTION ON PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL 2010

BACKGROUND:

I applied for my sabbatical two and half years into my tenure at Saint Paul's for two reasons. The first was that I had both my parents die from cancer in the previous year, my Dad spending his last 6 months being cared for at my home. Both Jan and I needed a rest and break from the home environment.

The other was to have the time to improve my knowledge and expertise in the use of digital technologies. Our school has two digital classrooms and I felt as though I needed to be at least aware of the possibilities of this ever-changing learning environment.

SCENARIO

Originally I had envisaged an Apple tour to Australia as well as its New Zealand counterpart but the Apple tour to Australia was cancelled so I had to look for alternatives. Luckily e-time in Christchurch organized a tour I could attend and I decided to attend the Learning@School conference in Rotorua as well as this was in the same term and would help me achieve the aims I had set for myself.

I also invested in an Iphone for myself to provide the mobile hardware and along with the Mobileme web facility the means to maintain a blog of my tour. The idea being that this was a way of getting the parent community introduced to blogs as an effective communication tool.

I also started a personal wiki so that in the future I can collaborate and share with the staff about my educational reading, viewing and thinking.

ARTIFACTS

I was unable to add to my blog and wiki as often as I had hoped as the cost of web access on my phone was prohibitive but I am reasonably happy that I have mastered its use and feel comfortable about introducing both as communication tools at school in the future.

They can be found at the following web addresses to view:

Wiki: http://sabbaticaljadwikispaces.com/

Blog: http://jnjdorman.blogspot.com/

There is no doubt that I have up-skilled myself in the use of blog and wiki. I have also seen first hand some hugely innovative programs in place that use digital opportunities as a driver for a 21st century methodology in teaching and learning.

I would comment however, that in Australia this is in conjunction with other initiatives such as a building program that is developing agile learning spaces and the associated collaborative teaching approach that is a result of these environments. This has come about as a result of the Australian Government funded building package and would be more difficult to replicate in New Zealand.

I have listed below some of the ideas that Saint Paul's could consider to continue on our journey toward transforming the school that is affordable and practical in our own unique circumstances:

1. I believe that we should put a small team together made up of staff, parents (member of the BOT?) and students as a School Transformation Team to prioritize, research and follow through with any proposed changes. (Including the possibilities listed here)

2. After seeing the inquiry process in action in the schools I visited in Australia I believe the key to development at Saint Paul's would be the formation of 'presentation teams' of up to 10 mixed age students from Year 4-8 students who would meet regularly to discuss progress. These groups would then meet evenings where they present 'new learning' to parents and the rest of the team. This would be constructed to allow question time from the 'facilitator' and students. I envisage that this would replace an event on our reporting schedule.

3. A demonstration of the iPad convinced me that this technology might be a way of continuing giving Saint Paul's students digital opportunities at a reduced cost. At under $1000 parents could purchase these outright for their children. The school could provide the cheap options that bulk buying might provide. Australian schools are pushing toward 1:1 computer use.

4. The Internet through blog, wiki and creative sites (see appendix) should continue to be explored as ways for children to showcase their learning and as communication tools between home and school. One schools motto was to 'learn anywhere anytime' and had a no blocking policy. Students could use Facebook to network. There was also a space developed where children could identify bullies in an anonymous way. Another school is using Moodle to report progress to parents and allowing parents to contribute to the final report.

5. A basic skill 'boot-camp' of one week at the beginning of each year would be a good way to provide students, parents and staff with basic skills. This would be organised by the ICT teacher and involve getting outside help from local experts.

6. The Professional Development Program for staff could be posted for a fortnightly basis but not be compulsory. If the program is not offering enough the alternative would be for the staff member to do an action research project and present results to the staff. Housekeeping staff meetings could be every second week.

7. The school looks into the possibility of purchasing digital microscopes for student use.

WEBSITES TO EXPLORE

There were two things that hit home and I feel we need to adopt as basic practice at Saint Paul's:

1. It is possible for the whole world to be an audience for our children's work and we need to promote this to our children. Showing where the hits have come from around the world as a basic add-on to any sites
2. We should be using the tools available to create everything in our presentations

www.starfall.com
www.readingeggs.com
www.Suzieslinks.com
www.lulu.com
www.questatlantis.com
www.tutpup.com
www.happysteve.com
www.glogster.com
www.ziptales.com
www.readwritethink.com
www.voicethread.com
www.wallwisher.com
www.zoo-m.com/flickr-storm
http://aviary.com/tools/myna
http://ictucan.wikispaces.com
http://www.ning.com/

These are a selection of sites that have amazing potential. One concrete thing we can do is have a regular sharing of exciting sites at our housekeeping staff meetings…