

SABBATICAL OF MURRAY LUCAS PRINCIPAL OF TAWA COLLEGE TERM 3 2010

A. Focus of the Sabbatical

The focus of my sabbatical was to examine the three Tawa College goals; Restorative Practices, Literacy (particularly with an IT focus) and the third goal related to the New Curriculum and Standards Alignment within the NZ context.

This was completed by visiting a number of NZ secondary schools as well as reading a number of pedagogical books.

B. Author

Murray Lucas, Principal at Tawa College, sabbatical conducted during Term 3, 2010.

C. Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Principals of all the schools that I visited during my sabbatical as well as Geoff O'Halloran, my Deputy Principal and Robyn Chester my Assistant Principal for being prepared to lead Tawa College during my absence. I also want to thank the Ministry of Education for their enlightened approach in allowing sabbaticals to take place.

D. Executive Summary

In terms of Restorative Practices – these are now taking place in most schools in NZ, particularly at the level of restorative chats. However very few schools are undertaking the mediated conferences at the pointy ended level as it is too costly in terms of the staff time and emotion. The success of Restorative Practices seems to relate to the number of key staff that are willing to stay in a particular college for a significant length of time to fully develop that change.

With regards to Literacy initiatives, I saw some excellent examples of how the Secondary Literacy Project is enhancing learning with regards to literacy across the curriculum. One particularly impressive school worked with a core group of teachers and gave written weekly tips to all staff. Schools that were strong in literacy believed passionately that it was not the domain or the responsibility of the English Department.

The clear trend that has developed with regards to curriculum standards alignment is a challenging of what constitutes the core subjects. Most believe that all seven learning areas should have equal weighting. The traditional view of Maths, English, Social Studies and Science being placed further up the hierarchy is being challenged at present. The value of the Arts in particular was an impressive feature of a number of quality schools that I visited.

In terms of the books that I read throughout my sabbatical, I felt that I was challenged with regards to our appraisal system and believe that the staff appraisal methods outlined in "Immunity to Change" was a more impressive procedure.

In terms of the book "Outliers", it challenged me about developing a summer school programme for some of our students from lower socio economic backgrounds. The observation is that generally students from all income brackets achieve at a similar level during the school term, but in the holidays and in particular the long American summer holidays, those from the lower socio economic groups perform very poorly as they are not stimulated and encouraged as much.

E. Purpose of Sabbatical

There were three key purposes of my sabbatical. The first was to visit schools and to obtain fresh perspectives on a number of educational issues that specifically pertain to Tawa College and beyond. The second purpose was to read a number of pedagogical books to gain a more informed view of how the educational experts regard the future direction of education. I would have loved to have visited Harvard University but at the end of the day I read a number of books written by people from Harvard, which more than compensated for this. The third purpose was to look at some of the co-curricular activities associated with our college and see the value that these activities provided both the students and the college community.

F/G. Background, Rationale and Methodolgy

Approximately half of my time on sabbatical I spent on education activities. I felt it would be good to visit a number of schools and talk to key people in matters that were relevant to Tawa College. I also read a number of books and summarised these books via a blog that I set up prior to my departure so that my staff could follow my progress throughout the term. The blog was entitled "lucasonsabbatical" and it was listed on blogger.com and blogspot.com. This enabled my sabbatical to become interactive in that teachers were able to engage in it via access to the blog.

H. Findings

I include a copy of the paper that I wrote regarding my sabbatical that I presented to the Tawa College Board of Trustees and at a meeting of the Tawa School Principal's Association.

I/J. Implications and Benefits

As previously stated, I am investigating the idea of starting a summer school in the 2012 year to help improve the educational outcomes of some of our students from lower socio economic backgrounds. I also have purchased copies of the book "Immunity to Change" for all of my senior leadership team so that we can perhaps engage in a new style of appraisal that I believe will make effective change that is adaptive rather than technical.

I have learnt a great deal about learning management systems and also gained some background on Solo Taxonomy which will further enhance the learning at Tawa College.

K. Conclusions

I believe that the direction that we are travelling at Tawa College at present is a good one and this was confirmed by my sabbatical. I also believe that by visiting other colleges in the NZ context you gain a number of good ideas and fresh perspectives on how different teachers look at these things. I am more convinced about the positive quality of our education system amongst secondary schools in NZ. There are a number of passionate teachers who give hours of their time, beyond the normal call of duty to enhance the learning of others.

The other conclusion I have determined it that it is vitally important that we provide equity of opportunity and outcomes for all students. A summer school type programme and keeping schools open over holidays I believe is an initiative that will improve equity.

I believe that effective appraisal systems should involve adaptive changes rather than technical changes which is what is currently happening.

L. References

King Arthur's Round Table - How collaborative conversations create smart organisations) by David Perkins

Good Business by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly

Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell

Drive – The Surprising Truth about what Motivates Us by Daniel Pink

Immunity to Change by Robert Keegan and Lisa Lahey

Say it Like Obama by Shel Leanne

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goreman