

The Acceleration of Able Students in New Zealand Secondary Schools **(with a particular interest in the influence of Pastoral Systems)**

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Introduction

At the outset, may I reiterate how grateful I was to the Board of Trustees and the Ministry of Education for allowing me to take a sabbatical during Term 3. It was the first substantial leave that I had taken for nearly ten years, and provided me with a great opportunity to see twelve very different New Zealand schools, read some thought-provoking educational analysis and enjoy a relaxing holiday on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. Initially, my intention was to look at acceleration of able students in boys' schools, both in New Zealand and overseas. However, as the consequence of hearing a very persuasive address by Dr John Hattie at the ABSNZ (Association of Boys' Schools of New Zealand) Conference in May, I changed the emphasis of my study. In short, Dr Hattie argued that student achievement differed not so much between schools in New Zealand, but rather, within schools. What made a real difference to student achievement was not so much whether a school was single-sex or co-ed, state or private, large or small, liberal or conservative, but rather the calibre of individual teachers within the school. With this different perspective in mind, I chose to visit a number of schools in New Zealand (twelve in all) which represented a varied landscape. Rather than looking only at the acceleration of students in boys' schools, I looked also at pastoral systems and leadership programmes which might impact on personalised learning.

1. Mana College (July 26)

My first visit was to Mana College, a Decile 2, multi-cultural school in Porirua of about five hundred students. It was a deliberate choice to begin my sabbatical by looking at a school that, on the surface, was quite different in demographic to Wellington College. I was particularly interested to meet key staff who spoke with me about two specific initiatives that were making a difference. The first concerned a new way of looking at the role of the form teacher. Each staff member was given pastoral charge of a group of students whom they mentored on a much closer basis than that of the traditional form teacher. After about six weeks, there was a non-teaching day during which the 'tutor/mentor' met with each student and his/her parents and specific academic goals were set for the year. A much closer link was thereby established between school and home, and progress was reviewed at another meeting during the middle of the year. This notion of an 'academic mentor', according to feedback from senior staff I interviewed, was proving very effective. The second initiative employed by Mana College was the use of STAR tests (produced by NZCER). These tests are an effective way of tracking progress in Years 9 and 10 and provide a clear indicator of progress within a year group. Both the creation of 'Academic Mentors', rather than Form Teachers and the introduction of STAR tests are worthy of consideration at Wellington College as a means of tracking and lifting academic progress, especially in Years 9 and 10.

2. Newlands College (July 27)

I chose to visit Newlands College as an example of a very good, suburban high school which has achieved well, both academically and in sport. It is a Decile 9 co-educational school, of

about 1000 students. Extension of most able students at Year 9 and Year 10 level is specifically through the Gifted and Talented programme, which is overseen by a Dean of Gifted and Talented students. Opportunities for such students include ICAS Science and English, Mathswell, Science Fair, CREST, an astronomy course and activities to develop creative and critical thinking. A couple of years ago, a student from Newlands College was named as a Premier Scholar and was, arguably, the very top performer in the New Zealand Scholarship Examinations. While my focus was on accelerating the most able students, it was very moving to visit the superb facility Newlands College has for fifty Special Needs students who meet the criteria for the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS). It was both inspiring and illuminating to see the highly professional and inclusive way in which these students have been made an integral part of Newlands College. This very impressive facility, in my view, does the Newlands College community proud and provides a meaningful education for a significant group who can so easily be ignored.

3. Hutt International Boys' School (July 28)

Hutt International Boys' School, better known as HIBS, is an integrated Decile 10, Year 7-13 boys' school of about 650 students. It has an excellent record in NCEA and I was interested to see what 'building blocks' were put in place in the Junior School to lay the foundation of academic success in the Senior School. A key position at both Year 9 and Year 10 is the position of Director of Year. In the job description for these positions is the statement "To provide leadership and mentoring to Year 10 students, so that they will be supported, motivated and encouraged to reach their intellectual, physical, social and spiritual potential." I was very impressed by the systematic way in which each student was set specific targets in class performance, extra-curricular activities and behaviour. Successful completion of set tasks leads to a Graduation certificate. Similar principles are applied in Year 11, 12 and 13. While the role of 'Director of Year' has some similarities to that of the traditional dean, monitoring of individual students appears to occur in much closer liaison with Tutor Group Teachers, Housemasters, The Chaplaincy team and the Senior staff. In short, it appears that the system in place at HIBS allows for a very close monitoring of the progress of each student, with the result that those who are struggling are identified very quickly. Resources at Wellington College of a single Dean working with Form Teachers seem paltry in comparison. Perhaps Wellington College needs to revisit the structure of our pastoral systems and think creatively of ways in which (a) Those in difficulty are identified and (b) successful students are rewarded. A 'HIBS' Graduation Diploma is awarded to Year 13 students who have fulfilled specified criteria. A Wellington College Graduation Diploma, adapted to our situation, would be worthy of consideration.

4. Palmerston North Boys' High School (July 30)

Palmerston North Boys' High School is a Decile 9 boys' school of about 1700 students. In many ways, it has a similar profile to Wellington College and has performed very well in the Scholarship examinations. P.N.B.H.S. operates a very interesting accelerate programme in Years 12 and 13, run in conjunction with Massey University. It is worth noting the research of Professor John Hattie who emphasises the importance of acceleration rather than 'enrichment' as the most effective way of extending able students. The course is offered as an accelerated programme for academically able students who intend to progress to university. It is offered to those student in Year 11 who gain a high level of achievement in

NCEA (level 1) and /or IGCSE subjects and NCEA (level 2) English, Mathematics and the Sciences.

Key features include the following:

- The Year 12 NCEA (level 3) and the Year 13 Advanced course must be regarded as an integrated two year programme involving study at NCEA (level 3) and at an advanced level consisting of study towards Massey University 100 level papers and/or NZQA Scholarship examinations.
- Students entering the Year 12-13 accelerate programme must have gained a significant number of Excellence grades in the previous year. Prerequisites will also include at least a Merit average in subjects that are being taken to the next level.
- Students in Year 12 must enter five NCEA (Level 3) subjects. Partial acceleration will need to be negotiated. They will not be able to enrol in Massey papers but, in exceptional cases, may enter the Scholarship examinations.
- Students in Year 13 must take the equivalent of five subjects, at or in advance of NCEA (level 3). Students are encouraged to repeat no more than three subjects.
- Year 13 students will be encouraged to enter a minimum of three scholarship standards. Students who repeat subjects will be expected to enter the scholarship standard in those subjects.
- Massey university papers offered by the school are available in selected subjects for students who have gained University Entrance. A maximum of four papers can be taken.
- English or a “language rich subject” must be taken for at least on of the two years.
- The underlying expectation is that students will have the required ability and motivation to succeed to a high level, thus providing them with an academic advantage as they move on to university.

The programme is impressive and the results are evident in Palmerston North Boys’ High’s results at the highest level. Acceleration is encouraged specifically and unequivocally. Students who graduate after two years have been extended academically but also provided with enrichment by selection of the Massey University papers. It is a model of academic development which is well-structured and highly successful.

5. Tauranga Boys (August 2)

Tauranga Boys College is a school with strong similarities to Wellington College. It has a roll of about 1800 students but is a Decile 6 school. There is a very clear path of acceleration for the most able academic students.

- In Year 9, there are two streamed classes, both of which are involved in an enriched programme.
- In Year 10, the top thirty students are invited to study in the ‘Accelerate’ class. In this class, the students study NCEA Level 1 Mathematics, NCEA Level 1 Science, NCEA Level 1 History and NCEA Level 1 English. This programme of acceleration continues in Year 11 when the students study NCEA Level 2 and in Year 12 when they study NCEA Level 3. In Year 13 they can choose a combination of Level 3 and 4 subjects, and a range of Stage 1 University Papers from Waikato and Auckland Universities. These are taught in the school.

- In Year 10, the next thirty students study NCEA Level 1 Mathematics, Science and Geography. The acceleration of those students continues in Year 11, where they study Level 2 Mathematics and a further five or six NCEA Level 1 subjects (although they can choose to do NCEA Level 2 Geography or History if they wish). The purpose of this programme is to give them a much broader base from which to choose their Senior school subjects.
- There is a tutor who is specifically assigned to monitor the progress of these students. Movement can occur both into and out of this programme.

Of particular interest to the programme at Tauranga Boys' High School is the extensive and increasing contact with both Waikato and Auckland Universities, and the opportunity for able students to begin courses while still at school. With on-line learning becoming more and more accessible, such possibilities need to be explored further by Wellington College.

6. Kristin School (August 3)

Kristin School is a relatively new, independent, Decile 10 co-educational school of 1600 students. It incorporates a Junior School, Middle School and Senior School. I spent most of my visitation in discussion with Mr Brendon Kelly, the Head of the Senior School. Acceleration of many students in the school is through the International Baccalaureate Programme which has been running at Kristin since 1989. Nearly 65% of Kristin students choose the IB Diploma Programme as their course of study in Years 12 and 13. The Diploma Programme is available to all students entering Year 12 providing they have met the relevant subject entry criteria. It is not a programme that is limited to the "intellectual elite". A wide range of subjects are available with most subjects offered at higher and standard levels. A number of pilot courses are offered at Kristin.

- While the IB is gaining popularity throughout New Zealand, Kristin was the first school to adopt the programme back in 1989. I.B. subjects are categorised into six learning areas including Language (Group 1), Second Language (Group 2), Individuals and Society (Group 3), Experimental Sciences (Group 4), Mathematics and Computer Science (Group 5), The Arts (Group 6). Students select one subject from Groups 1-5. The sixth subject may come from Group 6 or be another chosen from Groups 2, 3 or 4. Students study three subjects at a 'higher level' and three at a 'standard level'. In addition to this two year curriculum, the students must also complete three core requirements which are an integral part of the IB's philosophy and develop important study and personal skills. These are:
 1. The Theory of Knowledge, a course designed to encourage students to reflect on the nature of knowledge by examining different ways of knowing (perception, emotion, language and reason) and different kinds of knowledge (scientific, artistic, mathematical and historical).
 2. The Extended Essay, a 4000 word research project on a topic of the student's choosing, produced under the guidance of a supervisor.
 3. CAS Through involvement in creativity, action and service, students learn actively by participation in artistic activities, sports, expeditions and service projects outside of the formal curriculum. The programme is expected to take about 150 hours over two years.

Assessment The academic subjects are principally assessed by external examinations, which are sat in November of Year 13. Internally assessed components comprise about 20% of the overall grade. A student is graded from 1 (very poor) to 7 (excellent). In addition, up to three points may be awarded for performance in the extended essay and the theory of knowledge. In order to qualify for the Diploma, a candidate must complete all core requirements and have an aggregate of at least 24 points out of a possible 45. The IB Learner profile aims to develop learners who are “Inquirers, Thinkers, Communicators and risk-takers, who are balanced, caring, reflective, knowledgeable, principled and open-minded”. It is very similar to the Wellington College Learner Profile, derived from community consultation, which states that “Within a context of traditional values and cultural awareness, Wellington College learners (students and staff) are....Intellectually curious, creative and critical thinkers. Motivated, self-managing, lifelong learners. Adaptable and responsive to new ideas and experiences. Confident and effective communicators. Community focused and prepared to lead.”

The I.B., as presented at Kristin, is an impressive way of extending able students and emphasising a global perspective. It is a qualification which is internationally recognised and therefore very appealing. However, its structure does not always lend itself to compatibility with the New Zealand Scholarship Examinations, which have been a very effective focus for Wellington College students. The cost of I.B. is also very expensive and beyond the reach of most students in state schools.

7. Rosmini College (August 4)

Rosmini College is a medium sized, Decile 10, Catholic integrated boys' school. Its Headmaster is Mr Tom Gerrard, the longest serving principal in the country after thirty-four years at the helm. The tone at Rosmini College is very positive, reflecting a very well-defined set of values, significant staff involvement beyond the classroom and a very clear academic focus. Like Wellington College, Rosmini College has opted for NCEA as the major academic qualification for students, combined with a focus on New Zealand Scholarship for the very able students. Rosmini achieves academic pass-rates above the Decile 10 median.

Rosmini is a year 7-13 school, and introduces two streamed forms at Year 9. Students move in and out of these forms according to aptitude and attitude. The strong pastoral system in the College ensures that individual students are monitored closely. Rosmini College has a traditional view of the importance of examinations. All students in the Senior School (years 11-13) sit three sets of examinations to prepare them for the National Qualifications at the end of the year. The results in NCEA are excellent and the traditional style of education is affirmed. Mr Gerrard's long tenure is one which has obviously created tremendous stability, a sense of pride and ongoing achievement. It is inspirational to see a long-serving principal so obviously still enamoured of his role and serving his community with such success.

8. Auckland Grammar School (August 4)

Auckland Grammar School has long been regarded as New Zealand's leading academic state secondary school. It is a Decile 10 boys' school with a roll of about 2400 students. I was

interested to make some comparisons with Wellington College, particularly as I had begun my teaching career at Auckland Grammar School in 1978.

- Auckland Grammar still has complete streaming in Years 9 and 10, a philosophy which contrasts with that evident in most schools today. The school's philosophy is very clear. "Auckland Grammar School offers an academic programme with emphasis on national and international syllabi. All pupils are placed in classes targeted to their potential. The School caters for the special needs of the very able by offering accelerated classes and courses. The special needs of less able students are catered for by small class sizes, the careful selection of teachers and the provision of learning assistance programmes. Special provision is made for the disabled in accordance with the needs presented by the particular handicap a student may bear." Students are promoted and relegated on a relatively regular basis, depending on performance in the examinations which are held every term. Competition is explicit and students know exactly where they stand. There is a very strong emphasis on tailoring specific teaching styles to the needs of the individual student. Pass rates in the Senior School are very high. That a student may be in a relatively 'low' class is no barrier to success in national examinations. Auckland Grammar Senior Management would see those high pass-rates as a vindication of the school's very transparent and explicit philosophy.
- Auckland Grammar School had major philosophical objections to the introduction of NCEA, a standards based approach which Auckland Grammar School saw as anathema to a competitive system, and one fraught with the dangers of 'dumbing down' of the curriculum. Consequently, after much soul-searching the decision was made to join the Cambridge International Examinations, a system which, like the I.B., had international recognition. While the Auckland Grammar School Board felt that NCEA would fail to challenge the most able students and that the move to more internal assessment lacked robust moderation, it would be wrong to suggest that the move to C.I.E. was made only as a negative response to NCEA. Positive considerations included:
 - 1) Internationalisation is already a growing trend in education and in the future will almost certainly be reflected more strongly in secondary school criteria.
 - 2) Increasing numbers of students want to travel overseas. Therefore, they need a more portable qualification than NCEA.
 - 3) International benchmarking is another growing trend. Participation in international qualifications offers students a local opportunity to be internationally competitive.
 - 4) By becoming the first school in New Zealand to offer international qualifications on a significant scale, Auckland Grammar is both maintaining its differential as an academic school and enhancing its reputation as a leader in New Zealand Secondary education.

C.I.E. provides three general qualifications.

- a. The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (I.G.C.S.E.) at Year 11.
- b. The International Advanced Subsidiary (AS) at Year 12.
- c. The International Advanced Level (A Level) at Year 13.

Together, these examinations constitute a fully integrated set of secondary qualifications. While a range of assessment methods are used, there is a strong emphasis on external assessment. Internal assessment components are submitted to Cambridge for moderation. Auckland Grammar offers a dual pathway. Students may opt either for C.I.E. or NCEA. However, the most able students are directed to C.I.E.

While there is much more compatibility between C.I.E. and the New Zealand Scholarship examinations than the I.B., there is not a complete match. Nevertheless, Auckland Grammar School students continue to perform very well in New Zealand Scholarship examinations.

Auckland Grammar School has many points of similarity with Wellington College. It is a large boys' school with a similarly impressive heritage. It is similarly a traditional school with its emphasis on uniform, extra-curricular activities and clearly-defined behavioural expectations. The pastoral system is very similar with its emphasis on the role of the Dean. While, like Wellington College, Auckland Grammar maintains its prefect system, there are also increasingly other areas of opportunity for leadership in the senior school. Unlike Wellington College which has gone down the NCEA path Auckland Grammar leadership is convinced that both the syllabuses and examinations associated with C.I.E. provide a more rigorous education. The Mathematics Department at Wellington College, which uses C.I.E. in Years 11 and 12, certainly feels that the syllabus extends able students and is both rigorous and challenging.

9. St Kentigern College (August 5)

St Kentigern College is a school which has undergone significant changes over the last few years. Historically, it was a boys' school (Year 7-13). In recent years, it has developed into a separate Middle School for boys and girls, and a co-educational Senior school in Years 11-13. Currently, the total roll is about 1600. The school, like Kristin, is independent and Decile 10, and has recently introduced the International Baccalaureate as an option in Years 12 and 13. The College clearly takes considerable effort to tailor courses to the needs of individual students. In an excellent introduction entitled 'Planning your Course', the Senior School Course Handbook gives the following advice:

“As you plan your course and choose all your subject options think about these things:

- Your interests and abilities
- Which subjects you enjoy the most
- The skills you have and would like to develop
- Your preferred learning style
- Your possible future career interests
- Are there subject requirements (pre-requisites) at the next level?
- Subject requirements if considering the IB Diploma
- Any entry criteria for tertiary education?
- Is the subject on the University Approved list of subjects?
- Do I have sufficient flexibility to change my course if my career goals change?

ABILITY + INTEREST + CAREER GOAL = YOUR COURSE CHOICE

Students are very clearly offered a dual pathway for entrance to Tertiary study. Whether a student opts for the NCEA path or the I.B. path, able students are encouraged to attempt the New Zealand Scholarship examinations. Entry requirements to the I.B. programme are relatively open-ended, provided that the student has met the relevant individual subject entry criteria. The St Kentigern overview of the I.B. Diploma states

“Strong IB Diploma candidates are those who are highly motivated with average or above average ability across a range of subjects. In addition, they need to be able to organise and manage their time effectively. It is not an elitist qualification but its rigorous standards and sizeable workloads do require a great deal of commitment, organisation and initiative.”

While the I.B. is not an ‘accelerate’ programme in the conventional sense of the word, it is clearly another way of extending students, both in the range of subjects offered and also in the specific skills that are both taught and tested. It is interesting to note that in 2010, the Dux of St Kentigern had followed the I.B. pathway and the Proxime Accessit had followed the NCEA pathway.

Pastoral System

There is a very strong emphasis on pastoral care at St Kentigern College and, consequently, students are monitored closely not just in individual subjects, but also through a house system. All students in both the Middle School and Senior School are placed in four different houses in which they remain for their duration at school. There is a Head of House in both the Middle School and Senior School (eight in all). Houses are further sub-divided into small Tutor Groups. The Tutor for each group receives support and guidance from the Head of House. The progress of each student is monitored – socially, academically and emotionally. The pass-rates of NCEA are very high, as has been the performance historically of St Kentigern students in the New Zealand Scholarship examinations. The very thorough pastoral systems are backed up by qualified Counsellors, as well as the Chaplain and Christian Education team.

10. Mahurangi College (August 6)

Mahurangi College is a semi-rural, co-educational Decile 8 school of about 1100 students located in Warkworth. I was interested to have a look at the College as I had been the HOD English from 1988-1992. The college has grown significantly over the past eighteen years and there were a number of features of both the pastoral network and academic extension worthy of comment.

- Mahurangi College became a Year 7-13 school in 1974 and since then has been New Zealand’s largest school of that type. Mahurangi College is divided into four separate houses and many activities are based around this fundamental structure. Each house (hapu) is divided into a number of vertical forms (whanau) that comprise approximately twenty students of different levels. The student remains with that group of students and the same whanau teacher for up to the seven years for which he or she remains at the College. In essence, this is a variation of the tutorial system which a number of schools are adopting. Over a period of time, a close relationship is established between the whanau teacher and the student, thus enabling a rigorous observation of academic progress.
- There are a number of academic innovations which are meritorious. As Mahurangi College is a year 7-13 school, there is a natural division into Middle school (years 7-10) and Senior School (Years 11-13). As a means of boosting academic performance in the Middle School, a graduation diploma has been introduced for those students

who are completing Year 10. Diplomas are awarded at the Excellence, Merit and Achieved levels. It is a creative way of introducing students to the NCEA system and gives a focus to years which can easily be overlooked in secondary school.

- In the Senior School, there are a couple of features worthy of mention. To lift the status of academic achievement, Academic Blues are awarded to students who have gained Level 1 or Level 2 NCEA with Excellence. This is a very explicit way of recognising success in the classroom.
- Mahurangi College is also providing significant help to those who are struggling to achieve. All those students (at Levels 1,2 and 3) who are close to achieving 80 credits and are choosing mostly internally assessed courses, are required to remain at school after other seniors have been released for NCEA examinations, and given an opportunity to complete their courses and thereby gain the requisite number of credits to achieve. This is a sensible use of time and provides students with a worthwhile incentive. It was very encouraging to return to a school where I had spent four very enjoyable years and to see the significant progress that had been made and the very clear ways in which the needs of individual students were being met.

11. Wellington Girls College (August 16)

Wellington Girls' College is the sister school of Wellington College. A little smaller in size (about 1300) it is also a Decile 10 school. Surprisingly, there is not a great deal of interaction between the two staffs, and so it was interesting to see how Wellington Girls extended able students and dealt with the students from a pastoral point of view.

- Wellington Girls' College does not have a system of streaming or broad-banding in place in Years 9 and 10, but looks to differentiate within the general groupings. The academic success of Wellington Girls over many years confirms that this approach works for their clientele. There has been a very impressive emphasis on personalised learning at the College and from 2011, each Year 9 student will be required to purchase an electronic notebook. Rather than alternative curricula, such as the I.B. and C.I.E, or different methods of streaming, Wellington Girls' College has been a strong advocate of the New Zealand Curriculum, and differentiation within classes rather than between them. Thirty four girls gained Scholarships in 2009, a clear indication that, within the system adopted, academic success is considerable at the very top level. While classes are not streamed, there is an explicit emphasis on both Extension and Enrichment. The Wellington Girls' website states that:

“Opportunities are available to students as part of a differentiated programme in all learning areas. There are numerous additional extension and enrichment opportunities beyond the classroom. Examples include: Orchestra, Teal Voices, Tech Angels, Video Demons, Art Associates, Senior Drama, Book Club, Kapa haka, Waka ama, Poly Club and Writers Club”.

- There is a strong pastoral emphasis for students in Years 9 and 10. All incoming students are interviewed by the Principal and considerable care is invested in the composition of form classes. The Form Teacher is expected to assume an active role, and girls are monitored closely on an individual basis. It is interesting to

note that while the philosophical stance of Wellington Girls' is different in emphasis to a number of schools with more rigorous streaming and alternative curricular, its academic results are first-rate.

12. Macleans College (September 23)

Macleans College is a large (2300 students), co-educational Decile 10 school in Bucklands Beach. I taught there as Assistant HOD English from 1984-87, and so I was keen to look at the College over twenty years after I had left. Macleans has, historically, gained excellent academic results and has an unequivocal emphasis on student achievement. It was interesting to see how

(a) The distinctive 'whanau' system worked at Macleans and (b) Able students were accelerated.

- From its inception in 1980, Macleans College was built according to the 'whanau house' system. The College is now divided physically into eight separate houses. For many of their classes, especially in Years 9-11, the students are taught in their houses. Classrooms are based around a common area which is an ideal focal point for student life. The forms are horizontal rather than vertical, but students have a strong sense of identity with their house. In Years 12-13, students tend to move around the school more to facilitate specialist subject teaching. Although the College is large, whanau houses have only about 300 students. Consequently, the whanau (or house) leaders are able to work closely with form teachers and keep a close eye on students. Macleans College is a very good example of how large schools can be broken down into smaller, more personal units. Each house has developed a distinctive identity, based around the person after whom the house is named. (Mansfield, Hillary, Kupe, Te Kanawa, Snell, Batten, Rutherford, Upham). An element of competition is encouraged, as well as a strongly supportive environment where individuals have a 'home'. I was struck once again, after twenty three years, by how good a system the whanau house model is. It is surprising that schools built recently in New Zealand do not follow this excellent model that is still working well after thirty years.
- Acceleration of very able students is still facilitated primarily through the selection of two classes at every year level. The other fourteen classes (sixteen in total) are of mixed ability. It is interesting to note that it is only recently that Macleans have opted for two accelerate classes. Prior to that, they selected only one. There is a dual pathway offered from Year 11 where students can opt either for the C.I.E. pathway or the NCEA pathway. It would be fair to say that the majority of accelerate students choose the Cambridge pathway. The New Zealand Scholarship examinations are encouraged very strongly and Macleans' students last year won ninety-eight scholarships.

Of particular interest, however, is the Macleans College Effective Teaching and Learning – Best Practices Audit Documents. Over the last few years, staff at Macleans College have developed a very impressive data-analysis programme which accurately plots the progress of individual students and the performance of teachers. It is a very explicit, evidence-based approach which enables faculties and individual staff to analyse performance and set targets. It is suggested that each faculty have 2-3 major goals annually for particular emphasis. This school-

wide, systematic approach developed by Macleans College, is the most impressive innovation I observed during my sabbatical. It builds on the evidence-based approach championed by New Zealand academics such as John Hattie and Adrienne Alton-Lee and provides a truly systematic approach for staff development. It is a system that I would be very keen to be implemented at Wellington College. Macleans College is a truly impressive school. The strong pastoral emphasis coupled with a rigorous academic approach means that students are encouraged to achieve highly in a very supportive environment. It is a model that many other New Zealand schools could profit from greatly.

Some overall conclusions

It was, I believe, a wise decision to look at pastoral systems and the acceleration of able students in a variety of New Zealand schools, rather than focussing solely on boys' schools. My visits to twelve very good schools was supplemented by reading John Hattie's excellent book, "Visible Learning" – A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. Hattie's very thorough research provides compelling evidence of what actually makes a difference. It is, in many ways, a real challenge to traditional and deeply held assumptions. In my observation, schools of quite widely differing philosophies (such as Auckland Grammar School and Wellington Girls' College) were both achieving superb results. Their apparent points of difference (in terms of streaming, curriculum chosen etc) were obviously of relative insignificance when looking at student achievement which was very similar. One of Hattie's main contentions is that there is far less difference between schools than within schools. This difference often may be attributed to the quality of individual teachers. I was certainly impressed with the number of effective teaching strategies in place in schools of quite significant apparent difference. It is clear that no one educational model has a mortgage on excellence.

- Pastoral Systems

Whatever the system adopted, it seems to me that there is considerable merit in breaking schools down into much smaller units where there is meaningful interaction and monitoring. The vertical form system at Mahurangi College, the Whanau House system at Macleans College, the tutorial system at Mana College, are all effective models where someone other than the classroom teacher is responsible for the social and academic development of a small group of individuals. A system which enables a close relationship to develop over time (such as the vertical form system) has advantages in that the pastoral links are stronger. Hattie argues in 'Visible Learning' that "whenever there is a major transition in schools, then the key success factor is whether a child makes a friend in the first month." Anecdotal comments often suggest that the pressure of the peer group is particularly strong during teenage years. It is obvious that some sense of belonging is vital in ensuring that students feel secure and are therefore predisposed to learn. My own observations over the years confirm that many students who are underachieving do not have a real sense of connection with school. Feedback from parents at Wellington College during a Strategic Planning survey suggest that we perhaps need to do more with our "middle order batsmen", that large group of students who are not spectacular achievers, nor troublemakers. Rather, they may drift through the system without ever being noticed. The adoption of a different pastoral grouping, perhaps a vertical form system, would be an effective way of monitoring the progress of individual students more closely

rather than the conventional 'form class' system we adopt at present. One of my recommendations is that the staff should consider the options thoroughly in 2011 and, with buy in, adopt the most suitable model for Wellington College in 2012.

- Some observations of accelerate models

It was illuminating to examine models of acceleration in a wide variety of different schools. A number of interesting features emerged.

a) 'Acceleration' of students rather than so called 'enrichment'. The model used at both Palmerston North Boys' High School and Tauranga Boys' College is one which allows significant numbers of students to pass through NCEA at a quicker rate and, in many cases, achieve NCEA Level 3 at the end of Year 12. There is the minor issue of enabling those students to sit the New Zealand Scholarship examinations at the end of Year 13 when they may have dropped their strongest subjects after achieving Level 3 in Year 12. Hattie expresses surprise that "if acceleration is so successful, why is it one of the least used methods for gifted students?" His research contradicts widely held assumptions that acceleration may have a negative impact on the social development of the student. At Wellington College, we currently accelerate able students in Mathematics and Science. However, in English we have chosen to provide an enriched programme. In 2011, I would be interested to examine the assumptions behind our current system and determine whether we should also be using acceleration in English as the preferred method of extension.

b) A choice of curriculum options

Two schools I visited had chosen to teach the C.I.E. (Cambridge International Examinations) course and two others had chosen the International Baccalaureate. All of these schools claimed that these systems had an advantage over NCEA, especially for the more able students. However, all continued to provide NCEA as an option. It is difficult to determine whether the choice of a syllabus per se makes a substantial difference to the achievement of able students. However, there was a genuine conviction that both C.I.E. and the I.B. were very challenging and engaging for the students who had chosen that path. At Wellington College, the Cambridge examination is now being used in Mathematics in Years 11 and 12 with considerable success. Teachers and students enjoy the rigour of the syllabus and the awarding of a percentage at the end. Without significantly undermining the NCEA route which we have adopted at Wellington College, it would be interesting in 2011 to explore further whether there might be other subjects that would benefit from choosing the C.I.E. model. The outstanding results of Mathematics in the 2009 Scholarship Examinations (39 Scholarships in Statistics and Calculus) suggest that the C.I.E. syllabus in earlier years is paving the way for later success.

c) Streaming and broadbanding

Historically, I have been a strong advocate of streaming, but my observations in a number of schools lead me to suspect that its influence on the acceleration of able students may not be as great as I once believed. That is not to suggest,

however, that the very structured system of streaming at Auckland Grammar, for example, is ineffective. In that context, it works very well. But the results of non-streamed schools, such as Wellington Girls' College, would also provide a strong argument that able students may be extended as effectively in a non-selective environment. One is mindful of recent evidence-based research which emphasises the importance of the individual teacher. Macleans College has just two 'accelerate' classes out of sixteen at every level in the junior school. Wellington College has three 'accelerate' classes out of ten. We have used this model for many years without ever really questioning the rationale. In 2011, I would like our staff to look closely at our current structure and question whether it is the most effective. Perhaps we need to look more closely at streaming in individual subjects (timetable permitting) rather than using a blunt instrument to select ninety students for accelerate classes with little regard to individual strengths. At present, our arrangement of classes reflects more an historical evolution rather than an informed, evidence-based approach.

d) The importance of the individual teacher

Hattie claims that "it appears that the teachers students are assigned to may be more important than the schools they attend." There is great emphasis these days on school choice and the differences between schools, especially in the acceleration of able students. However, my observation of very good but quite different schools, illustrated for me the truth of Hattie's contention. Excellent results were being achieved in diverse schools. What they shared in common was not necessarily a similar philosophy but rather, excellent teachers who engaged with students and encouraged achievement.

As Hattie says

"Motivation is highest when students are competent, have sufficient autonomy, set worthwhile goals, get feedback and are affirmed by others"

Excellent teaching may occur in any school, irrespective of perceived philosophical stance. In our professional development over the past four years, Wellington College teachers have been encouraged to reflect on their own approaches and to seek meaningful feedback. In 2011, I will be keen to emphasise afresh the difference that the individual teacher can make for good or ill. A school cannot be a 'good' school, irrespective of public perception, if a significant number of teachers are not engaging meaningfully with their students.

e) The importance of settled classrooms

It really goes without saying that an ordered classroom is an essential prerequisite to meaningful learning and acceleration. It was a pleasure looking in the various schools and seeing how many clearly fostered a settled learning environment. Classrooms where students are on-task because they are engaged in their learning are the ideal and should be the norm. Hattie emphasises "Climate within the classroom, peer influence, lack of disruptive students, acceleration" as being pivotal to maximum success. Once again, this self-evident feature of a positive classroom structure cuts across philosophical boundaries. In 2011, I will be emphasising afresh at Wellington College the

centrality of an ordered environment and how vital that is to extending students of all abilities.

f) The systematic use of gathering data to inform Professional Development of staff

The Macleans College model of gathering data and then using it for self review purposes is particularly impressive. The whole Professional Development programme is driven by this sophisticated analysis and is highly effective in monitoring teacher performance. There has been a great deal spoken over the years by E.R.O. on the use of data to inform practice. The Macleans' approach is used school-wide and enables a very close tracking of individual students. In 2011, I am very keen for a number of key senior staff to visit Macleans College and determine whether the model might be adopted by Wellington College to enhance student performance, and particularly that of gifted students.

- The sabbatical was both refreshing and thought-provoking for me. Having been Headmaster of Wellington College for fifteen years, it is all too easy to rely on the 'tried and true'. Observing very different schools has been both an enriching and challenging experience. My own assumptions about learning have been challenged and there are a number of fundamental ideas I would like to explore at Wellington College.

Having returned to Wellington College with a renewed sense of purpose, determination and excitement, I am mindful of T.S. Eliot's famous lines in The Four Quartets:

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

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