

Dave Pauling's Sabbatical Study - 2019

- **Introduction** – purpose of study
- **Research methodology** – Case study used as in this is a case of... ie something to learn from. Formulate 3 or 4 key questions to guide discussion. Suggest keeping them simple and open ended.
- **Context & case study 1** RVS – your journey and identified desire to provide individualised learning programmes at secondary level based on student passions within a faith context.
- **Case study 2** Sydney Special Character schools
- **Case study 3** ChCh school – Hagley Community College, Principal Mike Fowler
- **Case study 4** Auckland school – King's School
- **Key findings and discussion**
- **Recommendations** for RVS and schools looking to develop innovative student centred learning at Y7-13

Introduction:

To explore best practice for our new Area School, looking specifically at Y7-13 curriculum with an emphasis on personalised learning. I was privileged to have had the opportunity to visit 7 schools over the period from September 2018 to September 2019 with this research in mind.

Research Methodology:

In this study, cases were used in the sense of being something to learn from. In other areas such as Law and Medicine, the use of case is common to formulate future practice & investigation. In this study four diverse cases were investigated to observe how individualised learning programmes at secondary levels are provided to meet students' individual passions. While not all of the schools are special character, most had a faith context for the individualised approach.

To provide an ability to compare observations, the following questions were used to guide discussion:

- 1 – Describe what your school is doing to individualise learning for/with students?
- 2 – What led you to prioritise this mode learning?
- 3 – What recommendations would you give to a small (25students per Y level) startup?
- 4 - What did I learn from these schools that is relevant to my study? (My reflection)

Context & Case Study 1

Richmond View School (RVS)

This brief discussion document is but a small part of the ongoing dialogue in-house and with our wider community as we navigate the path of our recent Change of Class. Richmond View School is on its way from being a small, newly integrated faith school of 90 Y0-8 students in 2013, to being a full area school (Y0-13) of 350 students by 2023. Area schooling has been a long term vision of the proprietors and the latest part of the journey to this point has been near six years. The change over a 10 year period is and has been immense.

At time of writing (mid 2019), RVS is in its first year of Y9 with planning, discussion and building well underway for how 2020 will look, as our first year with a complete Middle School. I expect the school to look something like this on the first day of 2020:

<https://www.thisjustgotpersonal.co.nz/discussion.html>

It is of significant importance to the governors of the school to remain true to the ethos of the school and the precepts of the Change of Class (CoC) application during this change. I will discuss briefly the ethos and CoC precepts shortly.

Case study 2:

I wish to thank the Marlborough Principal's Association & Class Furniture for the study grant that enabled me to travel to Sydney to visit 5 faith-based schools over 3 days. I felt the visits became as much a compare and contrast exercise as much as an observation of values and processes within each school.

The schools I visited ranged from a large 'super-futuristic' (in physical and curriculum design) area school through to a much smaller, more traditional area school nearer the Blue Mountains. Size was not the only significant variation, percentage of preference students, fee structure and staffing structures all being variables.

The compare and contrast that took place for me was around the first question, *"Describe what your school is doing to individualise learning for/with students?"*

The 4 schools I visited varied markedly regarding the language/philosophy around student agency as a means for personalising learning. Two schools saw liberal student agency and student-led learning from a young age to be the answer. The other two schools saw relational, deliberate teacher-led but student centred learning as the way forward.

Case study 3:

Hagley Community College (HCC) in Christchurch is a large community college with a history of meeting the needs of second chance student who have essentially failed in the mainstream school system.

I commend HCC for their desire to take disruption to educational norms in their stride as they pursue the tailoring of learning at HCC around its students. I felt endorsed in our pursuit of personalised learning pathways by the evidence of ownership, longevity in learning of previously non-engaged students and in the sense of community belonging by all.

The Principal and Deputy Principal of HCS spoke of the need for sustained relationship, trust and a commitment to looking at the hard issues to make a difference in education.

Testament to this was the fact that they have a DP for Staff welfare and a DP for Student Welfare, amongst others. The conversation reminded me of the evidence Dr Anne Milne produce several years ago now to point out the importance of identity & relationship as a driver/pre-cursor to achievement in the curriculum, rather than the other way around.

The other key discussion we had was around expectation of staff & parents towards students. Low student expectation in conduct and learning leads to low outcomes all round. High expectation of students is very important but placing high expectations without knowing each individuals limits, or without providing the scaffolding/support will only lead to resentment/disengagement in some and unhealthy stress levels in others. There is no other way than to roll our sleeves up, invest heavily in staff with a heart for young people, and ensure our leadership remains relationship driven.

Case Study 4:

This Auckland faith school is a long-standing private boys school that prides itself on meeting the needs of young men.

I worked at this school for four years early in my career and decided to return after 12 years to see if my fond memories of the ethos and resulting environment were still justified. I was not disappointed. The school have continued to change but the feel was the same, that of close community, all students known, relationship first, excellence and one size does not fit all. I spoke with the Deputy Principal at length regarding the model behind how the have found a road between high standards and student wellbeing.

Key findings and discussion

- Context is everything, all schools will have commonalities, what stood out is that each of them met the needs of their individual/considered students in unique ways.

- Our philosophy has long been defined, making it a working model on the ground in our context is where we are now.
- Schools that were successful in personalising learning were deliberate about staff appointments, deliberate with universally high staff standards across the school and went the extra mile.
- Schools successfully personalising learning began consistently with the student needs & relationships, not:
 - Timetables
 - Class placement logistics
 - Banding or streaming
 - Teacher availability

Recommendations for RVS and other schools looking to develop, student centred learning in Y9-13

See here for ongoing discussion:

<https://www.thisjustgotpersonal.co.nz/discussion.html>