

Sabbatical Report 2019

Peter Brooks – Principal Freyberg High School

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Purpose

To attend the Harvard course *Leadership an Evolving Vision* in July and the International Principals’ Conference in Shanghai in October *Creating Connections, Creating the Future* as the foundation for reflecting on where Freyberg High School is now and what strategy is needed to move the school forward so we can best prepare our students for their future.

Executive summary

The world is changing and education needs to adapt. The academic literature is increasingly clear about this and the need to have educational leaders who can drive and manage the huge pedagogical shift this requires in the teaching profession.

The ways that different schools were trying to address this change was the subject of my last sabbatical in 2014 and was reinforced when I attended the International Principals conference in Finland in 2015. Since then, the message has been loud and clear in a range of forums: in Ministry think tanks; in the Ministry’s four-year strategic plan 2016—2020; throughout Education Review Office publications; as part of the Teachers’ Council development programmes for Kahui Ako Lead Principals when I took on that role; and perhaps, most importantly, the Teachers’ Council Leadership framework and its accompanying Leadership capability document.

This progression is why I chose this year to attend the Harvard programme *Leadership an Evolving Vision* and the International Principals' conference in Shanghai *Creating Connections, Creating the Future* to develop my leadership further for the next stage of our school's development and to inform discussions on the regional and national bodies I am involved with.

On my first Principal sabbatical in 2014, I took the opportunity to see what was happening first hand in highly effective schools in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. I discussed with their principals and staff the ideas underpinning what they were doing and how they were achieving the pedagogical challenges confronting teachers today. I also took the opportunity to attend the University Teachers conference in Newcastle and see how they were responding to this.

These visits reinforced for me that each leader has to find ways to frame for themselves the key areas of this 'best evidence' that will have the biggest impact in their school.

This sabbatical has given me the time to read other principals' sabbatical reports to see how they have framed their enquiries. Reading these in sequence has allowed me to get an overall view of the changes that have occurred, the education literature that is in vogue in a particular year and the politics that are influencing educational leaders.

In 2007, almost a quarter of sabbatical award recipients chose to look at overseas models of education and go to overseas conferences. However, that has declined considerably since then and the focus of sabbaticals turned to improving student engagement, followed by examining the best ways to introduce ICT, and then the development of a strong focus on priority learners. In fact, of the 25 sabbaticals focussing on Maori and Pacifica achievement, 88% occur after 2010.

Since 2012, the emphasis has moved to educational leadership and the future-focussed curriculum. *The Best Evidence Synthesis* clearly played a key role in this.

The ERO reports *Leading Innovation on NZ Secondary Schools* and *School Leadership that Works* both emphasize the role that leaders must take in this change while acknowledging the many conflicting forces that make this so challenging.

The Harvard course has helped me to think about what I need to do to bring about this change effectively.

Leadership an evolving vision

The Harvard University Principals' Centre was founded by Roland Barth and he maintained that:

"The most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of staff development, comes not from listening to the good work of others but from sharing what we know with others...By reflecting on what we do, by giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge, we make meaning. We learn."

This intensive, seven-day programme allowed me to work with over 100 other experienced principals from across the globe. We also met twice a day with our small discussion group to reflect on what we were doing. Our particular focus group consisted of principals from Mexico, Texas, Western Australia, Melbourne, Canada, Georgia and Detroit.

Our convenor for this group was adjunct professor Suzanne Roy whose credentials speak to the quality of this programme: “Coach of aspiring and experienced educational leaders and teaching a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses. An educator for forty-six years, she has served as a superintendent, superintendent/principal, principal, counsellor, teacher, and athletics coach in public schools in Illinois and California. She was a member of The Principals Centre National Advisory Board for five years.”

This course is outstanding and without a doubt the best leadership programme that I have attended. It was great to catch up with Lisa Rodgers who used to work with Hekia Parata in the New Zealand Ministry of Education and whom I last met at a curriculum think tank in Wellington in 2016. She is now the Director of Education for Western Australia and chose to bring twenty of her top principals to this programme as a stepping stone to widespread change across their system.

Reflecting on why this programme is so effective, it was interesting to observe how much emphasis the team placed on developing the relationship between the principals and the lecturers, and how much time was put into building relational trust and making learning fun. This included being greeted at the door by the convenors each morning as we arrived for our breakfast, sharing together our experiences of being a principal through photos requested as a pre-course assignment, a whole day out at project adventure and twice-daily discussion groups to reflect on the sessions we had.

This is the number one strategy in John Hattie’s book: *Visible Learning*. The relationship between the student and the teacher is at the heart of all good learning.

Our vision of what leadership is genuinely evolved over the course of the week. Elizabeth City began by outlining what strategy in action looks like. Jim Honan built on this and used case studies to show how strategy and leadership are linked to performance. Ebony Bridewell Mitchell clearly demonstrated the importance of having the right culture if our programmes are going to succeed.

Deborah Helsing caused us to reflect on our role in the improvement equation and the importance of what she called “developing our immunity to change”. And we had a wonderful afternoon entitled “Conversations with Howard Gardiner” whom most educationalists have encountered primarily through his book on multiple intelligences.

These ideas were all brought together each day by programme leader Howard Blatt and then on the final day by Katherine Merseth who grounded us in how teachers feel in this equation.

We were told in no uncertain terms that if we can't put our strategy on one page then go back and have another look at it because it needs to be transparent, manageable and living.

We were certainly challenged and our role in the change equation was made very clear: make the very complex simple and take everyone with you on the journey.

Freyberg's journey so far

Our journey at Freyberg has been guided by a number of elements that provide quality education: improving engagement, providing a holistic range of opportunities, having high expectations and developing a culture of well-being. We have looked at structures and processes that will improve self-management, collaboration, creativity and leadership. All with the aim of creating pathways to future success, with the skills to meet challenges.

In our ongoing journey to achieve these aims, we have:

- Focussed on attendance and reduced the truancy rate, especially for Maori.
- Put a number of structures in place to develop a strong school culture and promote creativity.
- Developed an Annual Plan that fits on one A3 page.
- Made student and staff well-being a priority goal. Our Kahui Ako decided to have student and staff well-being as its central goal in 2019 and 2020 and we have contracted the NZ Institute of Well-being to guide us through this development.
- Become a Restorative School with a student League for Restorative Justice.
- Increased our funding streams and developed a positive working capital, largely through the recruitment of international students. This enabled more pastoral guidance and learning support to take place, improved our facilities and offered more option choices.
- Invested in sports and the arts and introduced academies to cater for students excelling in these areas.
- Developed a dedicated centre for our new Kiwis (migrants and refugees) and supported their families through the Computer in Homes programme.
- Maintained our focus on including and providing excellent programmes for students with special needs. We have one of the largest populations of Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) funded students in a NZ secondary school.
- Developed an attached teen parent unit and early childhood centre that can cater for up to 35 students.
- Taken on the management of the largest RTLB cluster in the country providing a service to 126 schools in the central region.
- Established a Kahui Ako with nine of our contributing schools.
- Developed a dedicated centre for International students to provide ESOL, pastoral support and the integrated Kiwi experience that will allow them to make the best of their stay.

- Recognised the key importance of attracting and retaining quality staff. We partnered with the Massey University School of Education to develop a Masters programme for teacher trainees and subsequently employed a number of these graduates.
- Developed a shared moral purpose that is now part of our strategic plan.
- Took steps to improve our culturally responsive practice.
- Continually reviewed our curriculum, introducing 100-minute first periods each day, introducing a Junior Diploma, being early adopters of blended e-learning, introducing a compulsory second language at Year 9 and including sign language. We are now the only mainstream school in New Zealand offering sign from Year 9 to Year 13.
- Adjusted the timetable to allow regular professional development each Wednesday from 2:30 to 4:30. This was an attempt to reduce the number of afterschool meetings and to acknowledge the importance of improving our practice.
- Moved to collaborative teacher inquiries.
- Introduced academic coaching. All staff are included, which keeps groups to approximately 15 students. This coach convenes a twenty-minute conference with the students and their parents to establish goals and reflect on progress. In addition, we introduced academic leaders at each year level to track student performance and work with the coaches to target at-risk students.
- Used data to a greater extent to inform decision-making. The purchase of the 'On Your Marks' programme for analysis has reduced the workload for HODs trying to evaluate courses and also provided a wealth of parameters, against both the school's previous performance and the performance of other schools nationally.
- Improved community engagement – for example, the parent portal on KAMAR, live reporting and booking on-line for parent interviews, and an active website and Facebook page.
- Introduced regular 'core class teacher meetings' in 2018 as an opportunity for teachers to discuss issues affecting learning in each core class, to collaborate and plan strategies to improve learning, and to celebrate success regularly.
- Encouraged overseas trips and developed relationships with schools in other countries. A number of subject areas offer the opportunity for students to travel overseas to gain global experience. Those studying Japanese have a biennial trip to Japan, those studying Spanish travelled to Chile last year. The Business Studies department travelled to the UK, the music department went to China this year and the biology department went to Indonesia.
- Encouraged distributed leadership.
- Encouraged student leadership. A student-led review of the structure of student leadership in 2018 has led to a new model in 2019 with a range of head students assigned a series of portfolios. In 2017, we moved to a student-led magazine *The Salamander* with a student editor and a range of student teams to cover every aspect of production. A group of students have formed the Restorative Justice League and had training in driving this from a student perspective.

- Developed career pathways. New options were introduced in the senior school that open up career pathways and take better recognition of the fact that only 30% of New Zealand secondary students go on to university and only 15% complete a degree. We have introduced hospitality, engineering, automotive, early childhood, driver education and U-Skills while extending our links with a range of tertiary providers in the community.
- Developed strong links with the Palmerston North City Council, local employers and other schools in the region through Talent Central and the development of the work ready passport. The digitization of this in 2019 through MyMahi has seen amazing strides in this area. We have a careers counsellor who works with tertiary providers and businesses as well as co-ordinating the STAR and Gateway programmes to facilitate pathways for our students.

What has Freyberg got right?

My experience at Harvard and my readings suggest we have got the following things right at Freyberg:

- We have developed a very strong inclusive and supportive culture that places us in an excellent position to take the next steps forward.
- We have a large number of excellent teachers who want to do the best for their students and are very open to pedagogical change.
- We have very strong senior and middle leaders who think creatively about globalisation and future focus.
- We have a number of very experienced and committed support staff who provide value well beyond what we are able to pay them.
- We are in a strong financial position thanks largely to our excellent programme for international students and an outstanding business manager.
- We have developed excellent structures and a range of career pathways for a wide range of students.
- We have a range of very good programmes for students at risk.
- We have begun to acknowledge the importance of staff and student well-being and have started programmes to address this.
- We are members of a Kahui Ako with a very diverse range of schools that is developing and growing a collaborative mindset.

What are the next steps for Freyberg?

My experience at Harvard and my readings suggest our next steps for improvement at Freyberg include the following:

- We need a clear overall strategy for achieving our moral purpose that everyone feels part of developing. The New Zealand Council of Educational Research conducted research on a sample of 34 of our staff at Freyberg in 2018. They found that although 86% felt the Principal was committed to

continual improvement and kept staff well up to date with education initiatives, only 41% thought staff were appropriately consulted about important decisions and only 31% felt the Principal created the conditions for staff to be motivated to do their best for improved student learning. Therefore, we need to re-visit our moral purpose and get genuine buy in.

- We need to spend more time engaging with our community, our teachers and our students so that they feel this is their strategy.
- Our strategy, like the Ministry's four-year plan 2016—2020, needs to fit on one A3 page.
- We need to look at what other innovative schools are trying, but we need to design our own curriculum that will work for our community.
- We need to provide more professional development opportunities for teachers in terms of the ideas behind 'The Universal Design for Learning'. To recognise that this is for everyone, not just those with what we have termed special learning needs.
- We need to understand the myth of average and what this means to our structures and pedagogies.
- We need to embrace the idea that every child is gifted and it is our job to find what that gift is – to genuinely believe that we are not here to find out how good is this child but what is this child good at?
- To recognise that while subject knowledge is important, it is not the end in itself but the vehicle for developing the key competencies of thinking, relating to others, understanding language, symbol and text, managing yourself and participating.
- We need to find ways to measure how effective we are that go beyond the purely academic.

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank the Ministry of Education for providing these sabbaticals. They should not be taken for granted and I became aware overseas, both in the secondary and tertiary sectors, that they were very envious of the opportunity we have. The balance of study, school visits and conferences with the rest and recreation time that allows you to think, read and reflect without the everyday pressures of the principal's role are invaluable.

I would like to thank the **Freyberg Board of Trustees** for allowing me the time away from the school and their positive support for what I wanted to do. And I would like to formally thank my great team: **Linda Smith** for taking on the role of Acting Principal, and the rest of the leadership team, **Bernard Harris**, **Kahui Watling**, **Debbie Littley**, **Ange O'Connor** and **Peter Thompson**, who all took on new roles and challenges to give me this opportunity.

Key recommended resources

I would recommend the following resources:

City, Elizabeth. *Strategy in Action: How School Systems can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching*.

Gawanda, Atul. *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*.

Honan, Jim. *Leadership, Strategy and Performance*.

Savitz-Romer. *Fulfilling the Promise. Reimagining school counselling to advance Academic Success*.

Bridewell, Mitchell. Various articles on school culture, and *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organisation*.

Merseth, K. *Inside Urban Schools: Promising Practices and strategies in Five High Performing Schools*.

Gardner, Howard. *Multiple Intelligences* to start with, then multiple blog posts and interviews.

Bendison, Linda and Robinson, Viviane and Hattie. (2012). *Principal Instructional Leadership and Secondary School Performance*.

Fullan, Michael. (2011). *Change Leader*.

Hargreaves, Andy and Fullan, Michael. (2012). *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*. Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Hargreaves, Andy and Shirley, Dennison. (2009). *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*.

Hattie, John. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers*.

Kahnerman, Daniel. (2011). *Thinking Fast and Slow*.

Ministry of Education. (2009). *Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration. School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*.

Robinson, Vivienne. (2011). *Student Centred Leadership*.

Whitaker, Todd. (2013). *What Great Principals Do Differently*.