

SCHOOL REBORN 2020 : PART 9

START OF 2019 - DOWN TO BUSINESS By Richard Wells

We're off to a good start in 2019. After a year of research, debate, concern and excitement, we've had two teacher-only days reimagining school and looking at really shifting teachers' understanding about what our rebirth is about and what it might look like. Over the two days, we ensured existing departments had hours to look at what the structural decisions meant to their dept, we had a full staff look at our schools official approach to learning and student agency (something we launched two years ago), we explored in a number of ways why and what integrated learning looked like and got started in new integrated teams who will spend 2019 writing the frameworks and resources for 16 new integrated units.

Empowered Learners



Our learning programme is focused on two key aspects: My learning progress & my learning environment. The 2 hour session on day 1 allowed depts to firstly consider the

general learning initiatives they'd added to their programmes over the last two years to support our approach to learning. They also looked at dept plans for 2019. Then we mixed the departments to share stories and plans with each other. This consolidated the idea that the school was a flexible learning environment and even under existing programmes was aimed at supporting students as individuals rather than only catering for the average. In our school students have choice and make their own decisions in regards to what and how they approach their work. It was important to set the scene first as the new integrated approach in 2020 will require but also better support this student-centred approach to learning.

Understanding integration

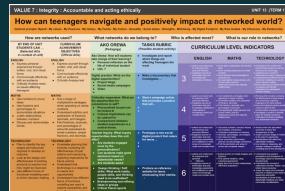
To refresh minds on why decisions had been made we gave teachers a choice at how they would look at the reasons for and practical implications of an integrated approach. The options were:

- Movie room: Most likely to succeed (My school had purchased the DVD)
- Radio room: The Myth of the Average (Why schools were built this way and why they now need to focus on the individual)
- Quiet Reading Room (National, International, and research) - "high school is a failed experiment" - Auckland Uni
- Q & A with Richard (me)
- Development room - "I love integration! Lets plan possibilities!"

There was positive feedback from all 5 sessions and a small number of staff came to me to say, "I get it now." It would interest children to know that when 140 teachers, who ask

children to read things all day, were given these options, more than half chose the movie!!

Let's get going!



I had sketched out an example unit to help teachers understand the elements we were focused on.

The department leaders of the existing subjects had

met with their staff on the first day to allocate a pair of staff for each of our 16 units that they had chosen their department to be involved in (e.g. Math is part of the focus for in 6 of the 16 units and so 6 pairs of Math teachers would join those 6 unit teams). Having 3 subjects as a focus on any unit meant that by the 2nd day, I was ready to form 16 teams of 6 teachers to develop each of the 16 units. We allocated a 2 hour meet and greet session for the teams to brainstorm their unit focus and where they and the students might take such a topic. The emphasis for the session was to keep the discussion broad and consider how students would personalise their inquiry / approach, while also gaining some level of progress in the 3 subject areas. It's so nice to know we are now placing equal importance and to such things as dance and movement as we are Math and literature, while allowing students to personalise what they focus more on. Measuring progress using the national curriculum levels means that all learning is personal to each student and it's no longer a single programme aimed at an 'average' student. I can honestly say that by the afternoon, I had had numerous feedback from all sorts of teachers, who expressed their excitement at working across subjects on more important value based units. After all, traditional subjects have always argued their importance but nobody is going to argue that Math or Technology alone is more important than equity or sustainability.

It's not all roses

Although I'm very happy with our progress to date and think the two teacher-only days were generally a great success, I'm not going to hide away from the fact that one in five teachers and parents are still somewhere between "we should not be doing this" and "it's ok but I'm really not sure it will work." My hope here is that there was enough evidence of staff having 'light bulb' moments during these two days that as we get more down on paper and detail added, all staff will get more comfortable and excited at the prospects of not having to micro-manage classes of students through exactly the same workload.

Next steps: Learning from others and lots and lots of team time.