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PERSONALISING LEARNING: PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This research project explores the perspectives of four New Zealand secondary school principals in regard to the concept of personalised learning. Using semi-structured interviews, their opinions were sought around three main questions; firstly, how do they conceptualise personalised learning? Secondly, how is personalised learning enacted within their schools currently and lastly, how do they intend leading transformational changes for the future? The findings suggest that personalised learning is comprised of three essential principles; partnerships, meta-cognition and student centrality. In practice it appears that personalised learning is occurring at the fringes of educational practice and has yet to be fully implemented within New Zealand secondary schools. The principals are clear that a transformational shift is currently occurring within education and that there are three main areas of leadership that they need to be consistently working at; Firstly, a collective vision is required, secondly a rigorous research base must underpin all decisions and thirdly, having both time and patience for change. In concluding, this research critiques current practices of personalised learning, suggests areas for improvement and puts forward an alternative organisational structure to support New Zealand secondary schools in personalising learning for students.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION:

Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance (Will Durant).

1.1 - Personalisation of Education:

In New Zealand, along with other westernised education systems, personalised learning appears to be seen as a distinct pedagogical approach which is critical in the role of schools educating students for the future (Hargreaves D, 2006, Leadbeater, 2008, Maharey, 2006). In generalised terms, personalised learning seeks to offer choice to a student and promote learner managed education (Humphreys 2008, Jeffs 2008, Leadbeater, 2008). Essentially, personalisation seeks to place the 'client' or 'consumer' at the heart of all delivery systems.

Contemporary academic writers such as Gilbert (2005), through discussion of a future knowledge society, Hood (1998) who discusses the shortfall of current secondary schooling, Caldwell (2006) in imagining a new future for education, along with Fullan (1993, 1999, 2003), Fullan and Hargreaves (1998) in exploring the vagaries of educational change, all these authors express sentiments that our traditional form of 'production line' schooling needs to be in the process of complex change to bring schools into line with a rapidly changing social and economic world.

Personalisation may demand such a change through demanding an altered school system which revolves around technological capability and an educational flexibility based on actual student choice across a much broader curriculum (Hargreaves D 2006, Hopkins, 2007, Leadbeater 2008,).

Some authors seem to regard it as an important and distinct shift away from our existing 'one size fits all system'; a system which perhaps does little to engage students in relevant education for their future (Gilbert 2005, Jeffs 2008, Humphreys 2008, Peters, 2003). In 1999, Littky and Allen made the following succinct point in terms of what may be needed to support personalised approaches;

Truly personalised learning requires re-organising schools to start with the student, not the subject matter. A school that takes personalised education to its full potential is less concerned with what knowledge is acquired and more interested in how knowledge is used. The priority at such a school is to know students and their families well enough to ensure that every learning experience excites the students to learn more. The school that looks at one student at a time truly prepares students for lifelong learning (Littky & Allen, 1999, p.28).

However, there may be some inherent problems in trying to transform our current system designed specifically for a 'mass education' (Harrison, 2004) to one that embodies the principles of personalised learning for each individual. This research seeks the underpinning principles of personalised learning as understood by secondary school principals and how this is enacted within the accepted core business of secondary schooling. This leads towards discussions of change management, particularly the concept of leading change in New Zealand schools.

1.2 - Importance in a New Zealand Context:

As a basis for state sector educational guidance in New Zealand, much of the current ministry documentation (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, Tolley, 2009) refers to Personalised Learning and transforming New Zealand education. The Ministry statement of intent for 2008-2013 suggests that schools need to work towards “Improving flexibility, responsiveness and choice, and exploring alternative models for teaching and learning, [which] will help build an education system that can adapt to change in the 21st-century.” (Ministry of Education, 2008, p.15).

Steve Maharey, Minister of Education for New Zealand from 2005 to 2007, suggested clearly that “Personalising learning is a way of describing the shift that is happening in our education system as we respond to the challenges of the 21st century.” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.3) and also that our education “system must fit the learner rather than the learner fit the system.” (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p.3).

However, with a change of government in 2008, it would be fair to ask whether this directional change is likely to be maintained. New Zealand education, like other countries, may be subject to shifting priorities in education as a result of changes in government which then impedes the development of educational changes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Yet the incoming and incumbent Minister, Anne Tolley, seems to suggest that this will continue as a priority; “What works for learners is recognition of their language, culture and identity, personalised teaching and learning, the concept of teacher as learner.” (2009, p.1).

Karen Sewell, the current New Zealand secretary for education, also indicates that personalised education is required to create a transformational change to prepare students to be successful citizens in the 21st century. However, whilst applauding educational initiatives over the last ten years, she states plainly that our successes to date have not “yet produced any of the transformational shifts we need.” (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 5). Additionally, it appears that the New Zealand Ministry of Education, as part of the Maori education strategy 2008-2012, feels that a framework to develop personalised education is a key feature of improving student outcomes;

A framework to ensure that the education system is responsive and flexible to ensure every young person can achieve their potential and be set up for life long learning. Personalising learning succeeds when students know what they know, how they know it, and what they need to learn next. (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 48)

In addition to the Ministry viewpoint in New Zealand, there also appears to be a generally accepted view that schools are failing to adapt quickly enough to our rapidly changing social environment, (Fullan, 1993, Gilbert, 2005, Harrison, 2004, Hood, 1998) and are not now providing the relevant skills and aptitudes required for the 21st century society. If we were to accept that to adapt to rapid changes, one needs to be responsive, flexible and able to ‘unlearn’ accepted practices to allow replacement with newer versions (Hattie, 2009, McWilliams, 2005) then it seems reasonable to concur with the claims from within the New Zealand Ministry of Education

that it is personalisation which may create the transformational shift required to move schools from a 'one size fits all' model to a more fluid and adaptable system that may better reflect our diverse society. If this is indeed the possibility, then working towards creating a personalised education system may be important and transformative work which could substantially alter the landscape of New Zealand education.

In a New Zealand context, if the thought of currently not meeting students future needs was not enough to galvanise action from schools, a recent New Zealand government inquiry into lifting achievement for all students recommended that; "All schools should ensure that the principles of personalised learning underpin the delivery of the curriculum, and each Education Review Office school review should report on how well schools are meeting this challenge." (House of Representatives, 2008, p. 16).

Whilst it may seem that mandating that these principles should underpin the curriculum is noble, particularly as educational writers such as Michael Fullan clearly suggest student outcomes will only improve if teachers have "a deep moral purpose and the ability to develop highly personalised classroom programs" (2008, p. 24), it may be more practical to firstly ensure that educators commonly understand what these principles actually are and what it may entail to place personalised learning into practice.

1.3 - Research Aims:

This research seeks to explore the underpinning principles of personalising learning, how these are understood by secondary school principals in New Zealand and what effects this may have on their school environment currently and in the future. The decision was made to focus on secondary school principals for two main reasons. Firstly, by virtue of their position in education, principals are extremely influential in regards to the processes, culture and structures of their schools (Fullan, 2008, Morrison, 2006, Robertson, 2005). Secondly, the concept of personalising learning has been closely linked as a precursor for significant changes of our education system. (Hargreaves, D. 2006, Humphreys, 2008, Maharey, 2006, Sewell, 2007).

By exploring the principals' perspectives with regard to personalised learning as a concept and how this may transform the New Zealand education system, it is envisaged that the research findings may assist with further developing the conversation about the future of 21st century education in this country. As a small scale qualitative research project, the research will not be making summative findings about best practice with regard to personalised learning or transformational leadership; however it does intend to provide suggestions for educational leaders to consider.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW:

I cannot say if things will get better if we change; what I can say is that they must change if we are to get better. (Georg Lichtenburg)

2.1 - Introduction:

As a relatively new conceptual term in education, personalising learning seems to have become more prominent in western educational and governmental literature over the last ten years (Keamy, Nicholas, Mahar, & Herrick, 2007). The literature used in this small study seeks to provide insights to the main concepts or principles *underpinning* personalised learning and, where possible, examine possible links between existing practices, beliefs or innovations in a New Zealand educational context.

In addition to literature relevant to personalised learning, it also seemed practical to review literature that dealt with leading change in both educational and business contexts. Leading change seems an important component of a review of personalisation as some literature on the topic seems to suggest that personalising learning may not only be derived from business practices (Hartley, 2007, Hopkins, 2007, Keamy et al, 2007), but may also herald significant and complex changes to our school organisation (Caldwell, 2006, Fullan, 2008, Hargreaves D, 2006, Humphreys, 2008, Jeffs, 2008, Littky and Allen, 1999, Maharey, 2006, Sewell, 2007).

This review is divided into eight sections with regard to varying aspects of personalisation and investigating the following questions:

1. History of personalisation: This section discusses the history of personalised learning with regard to where it seems to stem from and asks why it may be gaining status within education.
2. New Zealand concepts: This investigates what concepts currently exist for personalised learning and what has been enacted so far that may fall within this construct.
3. Treaty of Waitangi: This section discusses what impact the treaty may have on the concept of personalisation and whether there are any potential conflicts between New Zealand's founding document and a personalised education system.
4. The issue of autonomy: Personalisation seems to raise a question of choice with regard to students and caregivers in terms of how able or prepared our educational institutions are to provide autonomy within existing structures.
5. The role of schools: This discusses the traditional role of schools and whether this role may need to transform for a more personalised approach.
6. Schools for the future: The role of schools moves onto the discussion of schools for the future regarding what these may look like and what their main focus should be upon.

7. Transformational Leadership: This section investigates transformational leadership in terms of creating significant change and asks what this may mean for educational leaders now and in the future.
8. Connections: This last section attempts to draw together common threads from the literature review and connect underpinning principles of personalised learning with other salient points from the review.

These questions are deliberately posed to explore personalising learning along with the likelihood and impact of significant educational change as a result of personalised educational provisions. Drucker (2002) reminds us that now, more than ever, we must be thinking of how to keep moving forward to keep up with the ever increasing rate of societal change and that “we can also be sure that the society of 2030 will be very different from that of today” (Drucker, 2002, p. 299). These questions for the future may take us down unique and seemingly unusual pathways. With this in mind, it is important to remind ourselves of our own thought processes and the difficulty we may have of seeing systems as anything other than what we have experienced. Our own mental models, which are based on our ingrained assumptions and generalisations, will have an effect on how we view and make understanding of the world around us, including education (Moos, 2000, Senge, 2006).

2.2 - History of Personalisation.

The idea of personalised learning seemed to first appear in North American literature in the early 1980s, whilst in the United Kingdom the concept of 'customised personalised services' was introduced in the late 1990s during reforms of public services and in 2004, the United Kingdom officially placed personalised learning within an education policy framework (Keamy et al, 2007). Personalised Learning, as a distinct term in education, seems to have gained status as a result of these significant public service overhauls in the United Kingdom (Hartley, 2007). These overhauls, particularly in the public health sector, were seemingly intended to place the consumer at the heart of public service delivery (Hopkins, 2007). This intent included the ability of consumers to co-produce solutions with public service providers. It seems that concepts of co-production and 'designer' learning managed to find favour amongst the educational establishment, with the connotations of democracy inherent with co-produced solutions perhaps particularly appealing (Fullan, 2003). However, Hartley (2007) suggests that the concept of personalised learning has more in common with contemporary marketing theory than it does with educational theory. He suggests that the concept of personalisation is informed by the concept of mass customisation whereby businesses seek to continually customise their product to suit individual customers.

In the process of mass customisation, it may not be the product or service which is of central importance; it is the associated brand, experience and the relationship which has the import. By retaining the relationship with the

consumer, the business seeks to maintain consumer interest and sales through new imaging, product and consumerism. This suggests that personalised learning may also be about 'rebranding' or improving the customer 'experience' to maintain consumer (student) interest in the product (education).

If the basis of personalised learning is less in educational theory and more in contemporary marketing, this may mean great difficulties in implementation. Many educators may have difficulty with a 'market' approach to education and remain unable to reconcile business practices with education (Harrison, 2004, Hood, 1998, Moos, 2000). Yet the concepts of good business practices may not, as some educationalists may believe, be totally exclusive of each other. This is perhaps backed up by an apparent shift of many educationalists (Caldwell, 2006, Gilbert, 2005, Harrison, 2004, Hood, 1998,) towards a 'fast capitalist' or 'mass customisation' market approach to education in that they seem to suggest that schools develop the ability and flexibility to customise or rapidly change their products to suit their clients (Drucker, 2002, Hartley, 2007, Peters, 2003).

The roots of personalised learning seem to be a response to pressure upon state sector education to become more flexible in the 'product' offered to students. Perhaps this may be as a result of actual market demand or perhaps it is a deliberate attempt to further the marketisation of public schools. In either event, whilst some aspects of Personalised Learning may not be strongly founded on existing educational theory and that a 'mass

customisation' approach to education may have significant pitfalls that would need to be worked through, the philosophical reasoning of moving towards a system that seeks to enable students to ready themselves for a rapidly changing and uncertain future world appears both logical and morally defensible.

However, whilst personalising learning as a term is being used more frequently at a policy level in New Zealand and also seems to have gained status because of the connotations of democratic choice alongside an accepted marketing theory, questions remain with regard to the actual level of understanding and implementation within New Zealand secondary schools.

2.3 - New Zealand Concepts

Whilst discussing any specific New Zealand concepts of personalised learning it is important to note that personalisation, like many other western countries, is still in an embryonic stage (Keamy et al, 2007). However, from both a ministerial and a school initiative viewpoint, it appears that educational leaders may be beginning to develop their understandings and practices which could pave the way for transformational shifts demanded by the New Zealand Secretary for Education (Ministry of Education, 2008). According to a Ministry release specifically on Personalised Learning, then Minister for Education, Steve Maharey, suggested that;

Personalising learning is a way of renewing Clarence Beeby's vision of equal opportunity for all students. In Beeby's time as Secretary of Education in the 1940s, our system was transformed to open up education to those sections of the community that had been excluded in previous generations. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.3)

This idea of 'renewing' the vision of equal opportunity for all may be an important concept within personalised learning. It may also be a tacit agreement with those who argue that the current New Zealand system, whilst acting with all good intentions, has ended up failing significant sections of our student population, particularly those of low socio-economic status or minority groups (Gilbert, 2005, Harrison, 2004, Hood, 1998). The Ministry of Education in New Zealand appears to be aiming to address these 'failures' through personalised learning and, in particular, by focusing

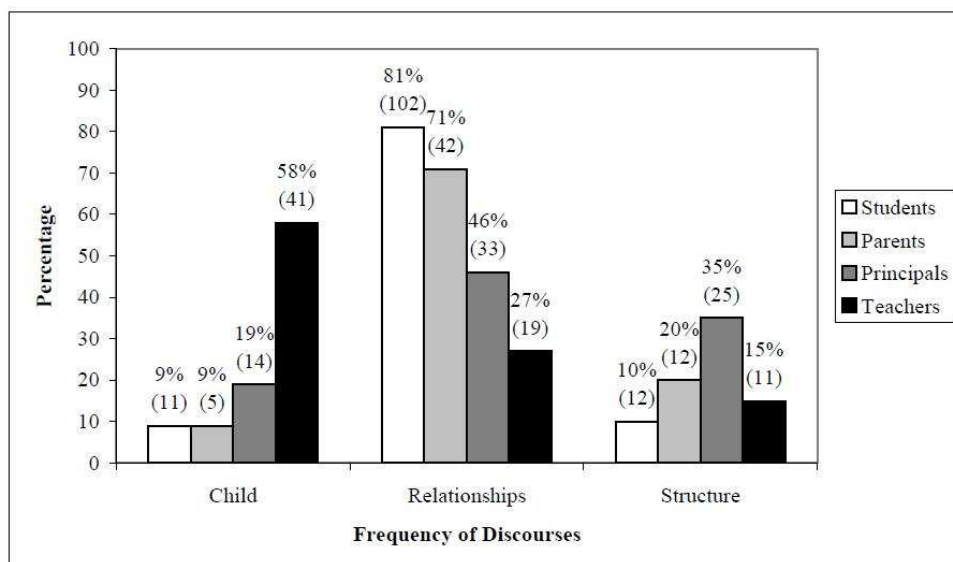
on developing better partnerships between a student's home environment and their school. As an example, the 'Let's talk about Personalising Learning' Ministry release states that "understanding where students 'come from', what drives them and what aspirations their parents and whānau have for them, will help to enhance their learning both at home and at school". (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 6)

In combination with such releases, additional government initiatives and resources have been allocated to encourage the concept of partnership, recent television advertisements are utilising high profile sports personalities encourage parents to be involved and help with their children's education whilst others seem to actively encourage parents to not be shy about going into schools to discuss what's happening (Ministry of Education, 2004). In this regard, it seems that the ministerial view of personalisation is to work towards increased levels of partnership between schools and parents, teachers and students. This is backed by New Zealand research that suggests "where parents are incorporated into the education of their children on terms they can understand and approve of, children do better at school." (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003, p. 13).

The concept of effective relationships and partnerships seems a key component of successful educational practice (Hattie, 2009). In a New Zealand context, where personalising learning may seem to hinge on the idea of effective partnerships between all stakeholders, this seems

synonymous with the findings of the recent Te Kotahitanga (TK) project (Bishop et al, 2003). This research was targeted at improving outcomes for underachieving Maori students and involved gathering narratives from year nine and ten students about what influences their performance in educational contexts. As a result of this student centred research, the TK project highlighted certain elements such as the importance of the student/teacher relationship, which may have positive outcomes for all students, rather than just being specific to year nine and ten Maori.

Influences on Maori achievement. Fig. 2.3.1



This comparative bar graph highlights the distinct differences in thinking with regard to what may have positive effects on student learning outcomes. A staggering 81% of students regarded the relationship with a teacher as important whereas only 27% of teachers felt the same way. If we were to place students at the heart of our delivery systems, as personalisation

seems to demand, it seems that an effective relationship between students and teachers is likely to be a foundational concept.

However, in the TK study, when students were questioned about the influence of family and their education, “No one spoke about the school and their parents together supporting their education or supporting one another.” (Bishop, et al, 2003, p. 244). In a New Zealand context, this may be a major concept within personalised education – to develop the partnerships between educational providers, students, and their families. Research from Canada (Jantzi & Leithwood, 2000), Denmark (Moos, 2000) and New Zealand (Clinton, Dixon & Hattie, 2007, Hattie, 2009) has shown the family educational culture to be a substantial moderator in a students educational outcomes.

This research intends to investigate the current understandings and practices of secondary schools with regard to developing the New Zealand concepts of personalised learning. Whilst based largely upon policy literature, these concepts appear to be founded upon ideals of equal opportunity to all individuals, greater educational partnership with the home and caregivers along with a focus on more effective relationships between student and teacher in the classroom.

2.4 - Treaty of Waitangi

In terms of discussing personalising learning within a New Zealand context, it seems inappropriate to omit any effects or impact that the Treaty of Waitangi (TOW) may have. The New Zealand Curriculum is specific in suggesting that the TOW should be an underpinning principle in all school decisions and strategies with regard to improving and maintaining high student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2007b). In this regard, we should also consider how the TOW may align with the overall concepts of personalising learning. At the heart of personalising learning seem basic fundamentals of choice, partnership and seeking opportunities specific to an individual. These fundamentals may be significant points that blend the Treaty of Waitangi with that of Personalised Learning.

In an educational context, Bishop and Glynn (1999) suggest three specific principles of the treaty which are important to student outcomes. These involve the ideals of self determination, protection of cultural beliefs and participation in the benefits of education.

Tino Rangitiratanga (self determination) is perhaps the most important principle of the treaty which should be respected by schools. Bishop and Glynn (1999) suggest that this is the most fundamental of issues in terms of education and Maori success. Tino Rangitiratanga appears to be directly in line with the principles of student choice and student voice with regard to personalising learning. By allowing students to negotiate their own learning,

to allow them to be heard in terms of what works best for them, we may be allowing a form of self determination.

The second principle follows on from this with regard to the cultural aspirations of any group. In a Maori context this may be interpreted as Taonga tuku iko (treasures from the ancestors) which reinforces the concept that students are not making choices in isolation (Bishop and Glynn, 1999). They each have a distinct history which needs to be respected and allowed for in the educational environment.

Learning processes need to recruit, rather than attempt to ignore and erase, the different subjectivities students bring to learning...Individuals have at their disposal a complex range of representational resources, never of one culture but of many cultures in their lived experience. The many layers of their identity and the many dimensions of their being. (Kalantzis and Cope, as cited in Bishop and Glynn, 1999, p. 170)

This recognition of individual and multilayered personalities is an important step for educators. Jane Gilbert outlines how these multiple layers of people have a profound effect on the success (or not) of individuals within our schooling structures. She suggests that many students disengage because they perceive the school to be out of touch with the 'main game' and therefore school is largely irrelevant to them (Gilbert, 2005).

The concept of making learning relevant is not startlingly new, however when coupled with the idea of what the student actually regards as valuable

it forces a re-think of what a teacher may actually offer. In terms of personalised learning, this aligns with an assessment of learning, not based on a form of standardised pre-test but on an actual dialogue with the student and family as to what educational benefits the teacher can provide.

The third principle, in terms of guaranteeing participation in the benefits of education (as opposed to just guaranteeing educational access) seems inextricably linked with ensuring that the first two principles are met. Whilst no guarantees in life are absolute, it seems probable that ensuring education for students is based around what is relevant to them and their family may assist in developing positive outcomes. In a very real sense, this is the concept of recognising that the educational environment, in its entirety, is critical to student outcomes (Coxon, Jenkins, Marshall and Massey, 1994).

In general, it appears that the Bishop and Glynn framework (1999) for applying the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi has a synergy with personalised learning which, rather than creating any conflict, may see each enhance the other in implementation. However, this implementation may raise issues within education, particularly the concept of self determination from students and caregivers within secondary schools. The next section looks to explore this further.

2.5 - The issue of Autonomy

Autonomy is essentially about the ability of an individual, or group of people, to express their Tino Rangitiratanga or their self determination. In this respect, when questioning how able or prepared our educational system is to provide autonomy, it appears obvious that students, and by default their caregivers, have little or no rights when it comes to school structures and environments (Lindley, 1986). Helen Gunter makes this point clear by suggesting that “children do not have rights and duties, and so are unable to be citizens and, consequently, their contribution to education is to be educated and trained” (Gunter, 2001, p. 125). Gunter suggests that this may be due to a misplaced view of students which fails to acknowledge their ability to reflect on and discuss issues that affect them as a result of their school systems (2001). Opinions of this nature appear to be a direct link to a central concept of personalising learning in terms of involving students and caregivers in educational decisions. Partnership cannot exist without involvement in decisions that directly affect any of the partners. In this sense, autonomy or self determination seems an integral component of personalised learning within schools.

Schools, though, are rigidly run systems in which discipline and order is seen as an essential component of good schooling. It has been suggested that, historically, this was in response to preparing students for the rigid demands of the factory floor, for which the children were destined for employment either as workers or managers (Gilbert, 2005).

David Hood, with a long history of school leadership in New Zealand makes the inadequacies of retaining this rigidity very clear;

While these concepts are important in any organisation in the schooling system they have been taken to lengths unparalleled elsewhere, except perhaps in the penal system and the military. Complex organisational models determine what a student will be doing each minute of the working day, stringent rules dictate every detail of expected behaviour in and out of the classroom, and uniform regulations take up several pages of school prospectuses. As we approach the 21st century convention still demands that practices remain for which there are now no logical rhyme or reason. (Hood, 1998, p. 16).

As a comparison, accepting that compulsory schooling and state schools are a government intervention, if the government was to intervene with regard to something as equally important such as health or diet and then proceeded to dictate daily terms in a similar fashion as schools, it is likely there would be a major public outcry to this invasion of theirs, and their children's, lives (Harrison, 2004).

Yet our accepted school conventions seem to leave little room for autonomy, both of parents and students within the schooling system. There appears to be a fear of parental or student voice with regard to educational preferences (Harrison, 2004, Humphreys, 2008). Parental and student voice may run the risk of being interpreted as either just irrelevant noise to be ignored or as a direct challenge to existing power structures (Gunter, 2001).

Schools may also fear that parents would be placed in the position of making uninformed decisions or choices that aren't felt to be in line with the goals of educational academics (Harrison, 2004). However this would seem to be a patronising attitude and one that is not in line with the general concept of a free democratic state. Additionally, there may be an ingrained viewpoint of some parents feeling unable to make 'effective choices' with regard to their children's education. Whilst we appear to hold egalitarian ideals, in that all can succeed regardless of their background, the reality seems to be that failure is commonly seen as a fault of an individual student, their home-life or other such things which are external to the school (Bishop et al, 2003). The school and systems are usually seen to be virtually blameless despite the significant failure rate of many students in that system (Hood, 1998).

However, in many cases it seems that parents do care about education, some to the extent of taking it upon themselves to ensure that a better or more relevant version of education is provided to their children. The many student's who are home schooled, or the New Zealand Kura Kaupapa initiative, are good examples of parents and communities exercising a form of choice to benefit their children. In situations whereby circumstance has allowed parents a higher degree of autonomy or self determination, the results are usually much better than those of the state sector.

A study by Rudner (1998) of 20,760 home schooled students found that the median student was typically in the 70th to 80th percentile. Such research

results may give rise to serious questions about the state of our educational systems;

Imagine if we discovered that people with no medical training were performing surgery in their kitchens with better results than surgeons operating in hospitals. We would be astounded – and we would wonder why we are spending billions of dollars on medical schools and hospitals (Sowell, 2000 as cited in Harrison, 2004, p. 69).

However, before we rush to shut down all schools and dismiss all teachers based on such evocative evidence, it may be more prudent to seek why a differing form of education may be more successful for some people. In this question lies the essential argument for a personalised education system, that within a multi-cultural society with differing values and interpretations of what is educationally important, it may be essential for schools to adapt to provide education deemed valuable by the diversity of students and their caregivers rather than what is mandated by the school. Demanding a shift towards flexibility of schools based on what is valuable to students, argues that schools currently propagate certain forms of knowledge or values over other forms. This could be a major contributing reason for the high '*failure*' rate of indigenous peoples in western schooling systems. As Norbert Witt points out; "a true seeker of wisdom would try to synthesise the different perspectives and the result would be growth of the global knowledge base rather than control of one kind of knowledge over the other" (2007, p.234).

Personalising learning may be a step towards this synthesise of differing perspectives in school environments. In terms of allowing Parental and student autonomy, with regard to content and forms of education offered, it seems probable that school structures and environments may need to become more flexible, responsive and appropriate to individual students.

2.6 The Role of Schools

It is somewhat amusing, in a rather dark fashion, that many educators seem to find some truth in David Hargreaves comment that “schools are still modelled on a curious mix of the factory, the asylum and the prison” (1994, p. 37). Yet regardless as to how much truth exists in this statement or not, it is important to review what the current role of schools actually is and whether this model is expected to continue or whether it should change.

In New Zealand schooling it appears that education is largely seen as an essential component for our individual and national economic survival (Hood, 1998). Harrison (2004) suggests that schools function under a ‘learn to earn’ concept. This is, in effect, a human capital theory – that the more we develop the education of people in our society then the more valuable they will be to society and thus the society itself will be better off economically, especially given the modern concept of globalisation and the perceived need for New Zealanders to ‘take their place’ in the global marketplace (Ministry of Education, 2008).

These concepts may only hold true so far as we can predict the nature and requirements of any future workforce or workplace. It seems almost universally accepted that many of the employment or fiscal opportunities in the next twenty years have not even been invented yet.

This uncertainty of future employment creates a problem in curriculum development with regard to both academic and vocational pathways.

Essentially, this future ambiguity has brought about a perceived need to

develop 'life long learners' or 'adaptability' as a means of preparing students for their uncertain and rapidly changing futures (Gilbert 2005, Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, Humphreys 2008). This avenue of thinking has perhaps been influential within the New Zealand curriculum documents which were "designed around a vision of confident, connected and actively involved students as lifelong learners." (Sewell, 2007, p. 1).

It appears that developing the skills of life long learning is perhaps the new paradigm for education and that schools will need to move from playing the 'ability game' to one of task orientation (Longworth, 2002, Sergiovanni, 2001). The ability game within schools seems to be about outperforming others, rather than developing intrinsic abilities with regard to education. In this sense, schools have often been seen as a place to 'get qualifications', however this culture tends to ensure that assessments determine and dominate school goals rather than serve them (Sergiovanni, 2000).

This perceived dominance of standardised secondary school qualifications, and the subsequent 'grading' of schools by the general public dependent on student results may create a possible conflict with the principles of personalisation. It seems problematic to have a mandated system of curriculum based assessments that students are required to undertake and then match this with the ideals of choice, flexibility of learning, partnership and skills for life long learning. However, the current New Zealand secretary for education, Karen Sewell, suggests that there is no potential conflict within the New Zealand qualifications system; "Like the new

curriculum, NCEA is a key component of personalising learning, where students are actively involved in making decisions about their own learning” (2007, p. 2). The extent to which this occurs may be arguable, however it seems a possibility given the breadth and availability of many differing forms of assessment that can form part of the overall qualification. It seems relevant though, that a warning of not allowing assessments to dominate school goals or values may be particularly relevant if personalised learning is to take place within school structures (Hargreaves, D. 1994, Sergiovanni, 2000,).

Schools, in addition to providing opportunity for qualifications, also perform a socialization role which may be just as important as the future earning ability of students. The idea of developing morally responsible people seems to form a core part of most schools view of themselves as an entity (Davis, 2007, Fullan, 1993, Sergiovanni, 1992). As John MacBeath clearly suggests; “School, a society in miniature, models the world for us and while shaping the child, indelibly shapes the child in the adult” (2008, p.111). In this regard, it appears that schools may require a paradigm shift from thinking of their role as an autonomous organisation designed to provide educational qualification opportunity to internal students, to one of a community in which the school has moral obligations and responsibilities to all members (Novak, 2008, Sergiovanni, 1992).

The role of schools, in terms of personalisation, may be more about developing a sense of community through consultation and involvement

rather than focusing on qualification outcomes. Developing community may be problematic however, as in some estimations at least one third of parents are disengaged with their children's education and are questioning the value of it (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Schooling, for many people, may be seen as an external provision to be enacted upon students rather than as a collaborative process amongst professionals and caregivers to educate the young people in our communities. Yet recent research conducted in five schools in Flaxmere, New Zealand, showed distinct improvements in student achievement as a result of innovations to develop the relationships between school and home, allowing caregivers to become more involved with their child's education (Clinton, Dixon & Hattie, 2007). With this in mind, one of the changing roles of schools may be to utilise their professional knowledge base and resources for the benefit of caregivers as educators for their own children. This may be especially important if we accept findings that suggest that "the nature of parental or caregiver involvement in their children's education is crucial to improved outcomes. Partnerships that align school and home practices and enable parents to actively support their children's in-school learning have shown some of the strongest impact on student outcomes" (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 90).

A 'new professionalism' for schools, and therefore teachers, may require support for personalisation in the sense of accepting responsibility for developing partnerships for learning between the home and school environments. Such partnerships may assist schools in reducing the perceptions of those who may view education as an external provision

enacted upon students towards a deeper cultural connection with their school (Sergiovanni, 2001). This may be a future role and challenge with regard to personalised education, to not just develop effective relationships with students within classes, but also effective educational relationships and partnerships with caregivers in their community. However, the extent to which this external role for schools is recognised by school leaders and in what ways such partnerships are being developed requires further investigation.

2.7 - Schools for the future

There is perhaps no doubt we want good schools for the future, however there may be differing views about what our schools for the future should look like and what their focus should be upon. Sergiovanni (2000) suggests three essential characteristics that form the basis for a 'good' school, regardless of whether they are traditional, progressive, special character, state or private;

1. Parents, teachers and students are satisfied with the school.
2. The schools are successful in achieving their own explicit goals
3. Graduates exhibit democratic values, attitudes and behaviours.

However, these characteristics may miss some of the inherent problems with education for the future. Many so called 'successful' schools may not actually be preparing students at all well for the future. It is possible that parents, nostalgic for well disciplined, traditional academic achieving schools such as those perceived in the private sector, may unwittingly be perpetuating an environment that serves little purpose for their child (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998, Hood, 1998). The essential characteristics of Sergiovanni, whilst admirable and having a place, seem to miss certain crucial elements of education for the future, in particular that of preparing students to be adaptable, to be comfortable with a degree of uncertainty, and to be able to be responsive to the rapidly changing social environment that a student will need to operate in (Caldwell, 2006, Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998). Schools, traditionally, are a place emphasising discipline and

order (Hood, 1998) but these characteristics are impediments to creating adaptable, creative and self determining individuals. Too much order has a tendency to create fear, active or passive resistance and worse, in educational terms, a submissive dependency on the teacher (Fullan, 2003).

Personalising education seems to demand a shift away from dependency on an authoritative teacher figure to an environment that demands a 'co-construction' of educational opportunity (Hartley, 2007). This may demand such radical changes of school organisation and processes that it may fall within the construct of a 'transformational change' in education. Yet there appears a perceived slowness of schools to change, or indeed cope with change at all, however this may be due to what Sergiovanni calls a "conspiracy of mediocrity" (1992, p.5) in that the policies and practices within schools create an environment where school leaders and teachers become incapable of thinking and acting outside their roles. In effect, reforms become simply an exercise of 'tinkering' with the status quo, a tacking onto the existing education system and fail to get to the heart of educational change (Deal, 2007, Hood, 1998). However, for core educational changes to occur Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) suggest that school leaders and teachers need to focus on three main areas; First, the public imagination must be captured to demand such change. Secondly, they must focus on relationships, as it is only through strong relationships that effective and lasting change will occur, and lastly, teachers and educational leaders must continually seek and work towards changes that benefit students.

For personalised education to become a reality, the role of future schools may be about developing the attitudes and culture, both internally with teachers and students, along with externally in the home and community to make personalised learning possible. Whilst we can hypothesise about what role schools may play in thirty years time, or what these schools may look like because of technological advances or other such impacts, the role of schools in the more immediate future is perhaps more likely to be founded on developing high trust relationships and partnerships both internally and externally to the school environment.

A future school that succeeds in personalising learning may have to let go of the traditional mix of 'prison asylum' whereby every moment and movement of a student is controlled by school dictates. This may be a significant change, to the extent of requiring a transformational shift from educators, and as such may depend greatly on the school leadership in terms of creating and sustaining such a shift. The next section investigates such transformational shifts in the future of education.

2.7 - Transformational Leadership:

Any transformational approach has but one goal, to create something that is radically different to the original state (Hargreaves, A. 2008, Kotter, 1990, 1996). Transformation is about creating change, moreover, it is significant change, systematically implemented and sustained long term (Caldwell, 2006). If a transformation of our education system is desired then it seems that our school leaders must be prepared to lead such changes.

To create such transformational shifts in education, we may need an increased focus on transformational leadership as opposed to a more conventional transactional approach (Davis, 2007, Harris, Hopkins, Jackson & West, 2000). Transactional leadership appears to be largely based upon influencing people through rewards or punishments to achieve desired levels of performance (Bass, 1990, Burns, 1978, Bush, 2003). Workers (or students) are motivated by the promise of some form of reward or the threat of negative disciplinary actions. However, this suggests that any change based upon transactional methods may last only as long as the promise itself. In this regard it appears that transactional leadership is more suited to maintaining existing performances and procedures. Whilst this remains a critical component of leadership, as no business can survive without effective day to day procedures, in our rapidly changing environment it seems plausible that those who focus largely on maintaining the present will become historical artefacts (Kotter, 1996).

In this respect, a future focus around transformational change suggests that school leaders may need to be aware of the underpinning factors of transformational leadership. In generally accepted terms (Bass, 1990, Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998, Hay, 2007), transformational leadership combines four basic premises:

1. *Idealized influence* is about building trust and confidence from individuals within an organization. Confidence in the leader provides a foundation for accepting a vision for organisational change.
2. *Inspirational motivation* issues challenges for engaging people in an organisation in shared goals and undertakings. Its goal is to provide purpose and stimulate an individual's motivation to act in a desired direction.
3. *Intellectual stimulation* develops independent thought. For transformational leaders, learning is valued and unexpected problems are seen as opportunities to learn rather than barriers to change. Organisational members are encouraged to think deeply and converse about better ways to realise the vision.
4. *Individualized consideration* provides coaching, mentoring and growth opportunities for each individual. As a result, a desired outcome is people developing intrinsic motivation for their tasks.

This intrinsic motivation for transformational change seems only likely to occur "when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and

mission of the group, and when they stir employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group.” (Bass, 1990, p. 21)

Enabling people to look beyond the ‘self-interest’ that transactional theory is based upon suggests that a fundamental for transformational educational leadership is about having or creating a clear vision for the future (Bass & Steidlmeier 1998, Devanna & Tichy, 1990, Southworth, 2008). However, as Bush (2003) points out, a common pitfall for many educational leaders is a tendency to generalise their objectives to the point of no real use. As a result of this generalisation, leadership then fails to engage enough people to share and agree with this vision to the point of wanting to act on it. From business perspectives, it is common practice for a leader to try and surround themselves with people who share the idea or vision (Kotter, 1990, 1996). However Fullan (1999) points out that working with the ‘enchanted few’ possibly creates social barriers within schools and is thus inhibitive to sustained change. For sustained change, it seems important that all members of the organisation support these values, or vision, otherwise disharmony and dissonance is likely to occur (Bush, 2003).

The challenge for a transformational leader in an education setting may not just be about sharing or developing a future vision but in developing a set of values that is shared by all people in the educational community.

This broadens the requirement for leadership to the external worldviews of parents and the community outside the school (Davies, 2008, Sergiovanni, 2001). In this respect, it seems appropriate that transformational

educational leadership is not just about structures and procedures that may better suit a future ideal, but about seeking a cultural change in people involved in the educational environment (Giancola & Hutchison, 2005, Harris et al, 2000). As Peter Block suggested in 1993, "if there is no transformation inside of us, all the structural change in the world will have no impact on our institutions." (Block, as cited in Giancola & Hutchison, 2005, p. 102).

Whilst Transformational change may be more about people rather than distinct organisational structures, it may also need to include 'strategic abandonment' for the future good as much as it is with wholesale new approaches (Davis, 2007). The key to strategic abandonment is wholesale replacement of, rather than additions to, existing practices to create cultural shifts within people. Strategic abandonment impacts on people through creating pressure to shift in a desired direction and also helps negate the danger of 'innovatitis' affecting the performance of leaders, teachers and schools, whereby the continual tacking on of new innovations, methods and curricular changes can lead to disillusionment and burnout (Davis, 2007, Fullan, 2008, Hargreaves & Fink, 2007). The development of people through strategic abandonment, as a distinct strategy for transformational leadership, may require a high element of 'unlearning' in terms of being able to let go of deep seated behaviours and beliefs that may prevent people from moving from the comfort of established routines (Deal, 2007, McWilliams, 2002, Senge, 2006, West, 2000).

It is important to bear in mind that fundamental changes to our education system have rarely been accomplished; therefore there is no simple solution for all schools (Fullan, 2003). The future, as has always been the case, remains uncertain. Whilst many of us look for certainty to provide us with a level of comfort, it is a timely reminder from John Novak who suggests that “certainty can be the enemy of freedom and the force that stops much needed discussion.” (Novak, 2008, p. 38). The development of a shared vision within a school environment, improving an individuals’ intrinsic motivation, encouraging intellectual conversation and focussing on individuals personal growth may all be much needed discussions in our current school environments. These four interdependent aspects of transformational leadership suggest a possible synergy between personalisation and transformational leadership based “upon the inner dynamics of a freely embraced change of heart in the realm of core values and motivation, upon open-ended intellectual stimulation.” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998, P.3)

If personalisation includes developing high trust partnerships, based upon fair choice and the ability to co-produce solutions, these underpinning principles or values may indeed be able to assist teachers and leaders with developing transformational leadership within education.

2.9 - Connections

Most literature in this review expressed not just a desire for, but an impending inevitability of transformational change within our educational organisations. Whether this be through mandated requirements, intrinsic desire from educators, or as Michael Fullan suggests, the utopian ideal of having “core instructional priorities coincide for both schools and governments” (Fullan, 2008, p. 48), it seems that change may be unavoidable. Yet with governments mandating significant transformational changes, an ‘us versus them’ mentality seemed to be coming through strongly in much literature, particularly that of the United Kingdom and United States (Fullan, 2008, Hargreaves & Fink, 2007, Sergiovanni, 2001). According to Fullan (2008), apparently only about one third of educators feel that governmental systems are ‘on their side’. It appears that the pressure of top down reforms is seen to rob educational leaders of their ability to lead within their communities.

However, with recent governments starting to instil the principles of personalisation as underpinning factors in decisions about education, it may be that the policies of government and desires of educationalists may be less asynchronous. A cross section of underpinning principles for personalised education from the United Kingdom (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008), Australia (Keamy et al, 2007), The United States (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007) and New

Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2006) seemed to show the following commonalities;

1. Learners are central:

Personalising education involves placing the needs and interests of students at the centre of educational provisions. Personalisation contains an expectation of creating engaged learners who are informed and empowered through student voice and choice. Additionally, personalisation appears to contain a focus on improving outcomes for all students and reducing achievement gaps.

2. Effective Teaching and Learning:

There seems little doubt that the core business of schools is to improve the learning outcomes for students and that good teachers make a significant difference as professionals (Robertson, 2005, Alton-Lee, 2003). In terms of personalised learning, common factors for effective educators seems to include their ability to develop effective relationships with students, an ability to differentiate for students within class structures and a pedagogy aimed towards developing life long learners.

3. Community Partnerships:

An educational organisation that embraces the concept of personalising education will need to develop stronger community ties and actively seek or promote strong relationships between adults and students, both internally and externally to the school. This seems to encourage and promote the

idea of networks rather than schools existing in isolation and that all schools must have strong links with the home, community, businesses and institutions.

4. Flexible Organisational Structures:

School leaders and teachers may need to reconsider existing organisational structures, such as timetabling and curriculum, to better suit the learning needs and requirements of learners. In effect, this suggests better utilising resources to ensure they are available to students when and where they may need them.

Despite these commonly mandated principles, there is also an important element of context in understanding what personalised learning means. Personalisation calls for educational institutions and systems to respond in ways that support the diverse personal aspirations of learners. The endeavour to respond to all individuals and groups in an egalitarian fashion is a value seemingly common to schools (Keamy, 2006) yet personalisation appears to challenge this by suggesting that providing equal opportunity is not the same as seeking equitable outcomes for all students.

In a New Zealand context, personalisation and the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi seem to share a measure of symmetry, especially in terms of seeking equitable outcomes for students. The idea of consultation and choice seems distinctly synonymous with the principles of partnership, participation and a guarantee of benefits (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

In relation to this synergy, Sergiovanni (1992, 2001) also suggests that an important factor, perhaps critical to establishing a personalised educational environment, resides in the level of cultural connection between students, their families, teachers and the school. Effectively, there may be two main types of connection between students and schooling; rational or cultural. Rational connections are about trades and logic. This is a reward/punishment environment based on extrinsic motivators; complete the work for rewards such as qualifications, compliments, or even lollies in some classrooms. Fail to comply and you then take the punishments - detentions, criticism, poor report cards and other such negative aspects. This seems closely linked with the concept of transactional leadership whereby any compliance within the organisation is as a result of individual reward or punishment. However, such transactions have a time-span that lasts only the length of time that the reward or punishment remains as an effective motivator.

Cultural connections, in comparison, are a much deeper phenomenon which impacts intrinsically on our ability and motivation to perform. A cultural connection is a form of social covenant which is created and maintained by "loyalty, fidelity, kinship, sense of identity, obligation, duty, responsibility, and reciprocity." (Sergiovanni, 2001, p. 64). A social covenant may be the epitome of a developed partnership whereby the relationship has shifted past that of a transactional convenience to one whereby actions and thoughts have become a cultural expectation. This idea of developing social covenants may be a key element of personalised learning alongside

transformational leadership as this sense of connection and commitment can only occur in a high trust environment that focuses on relationships, partnerships and mutually shared benefits (Fullan, 2008, Giancola & Hutchison, 2005). These components seem almost synonymous with the underpinning principles of transformational leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998, Hay, 2007) as well as that of the Treaty of Waitangi (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Most contemporary literature, in terms of personalisation and transformational leadership, seems to build on this premise of developing high trust partnerships and community amongst educational stakeholders and that this appears to have a high impact on improving student outcomes (Hattie, 2009). This type of personalised involvement;

demonstrates what can be achieved when parents and communities are engaged and empowered to advocate for and help improve the quality of education for some of the nation's poorest children. Great value can be added to educational investment through parallel investment in parent and community development. Educators cannot be expected to do everything themselves. (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008, p. 1).

Personalising learning, whilst perhaps demanding a flexibility of curriculum and school organisation, seems to be embodied with the idea of opening dialogue between teachers, students and their caregivers to develop effective relationships with moral obligations to each other. The concept of

flexibility of the school as an organisation may simply be in preparation for the diverse requirements as a result of such dialogue.

However, despite the prevalence of government mandates for personalised learning, it will likely remain just an idea unless accepted by all those with vested interests in education. This raises specific questions for this research in terms of personalising learning and secondary school leaders. Essentially, how do they conceptualise personalised learning, how is this enacted within their schools currently and how do they intend leading any transformational changes for the future.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

If we knew what we were doing it wouldn't be research (Albert Einstein)

3.1 - Introduction:

Respected research depends much on the data that underpins it for its credibility. The manner in which data has been collected may be just as important as the research findings. It would seem that this is especially so in the social science and educational fields where the research generally involves human interactions.

For this purpose, the philosophical theory of Immanuel Kant is accepted by the author as a moral foundation to build ethics of respect upon. Central to this theory is the concept that all persons are worthy of respect, with all that having respect for another entails, simply because they are human beings. As suggested by Robin Dillon (2007), "Respect for such beings is not only appropriate but also morally and unconditionally required: the status and worth of [any] person is such that they must always be respected." (p. 2)

If we accept this as a basis for our ethical foundations, it suggests then that respect is a set of behaviours and attitudes towards other human beings whereby they are to be held as being intrinsically valuable in their own right. This is an extremely important viewpoint in terms of educational research as often a researcher, by virtue of their position, is in a position of 'power over' the researched and as such must exercise caution in their behavioural approach to research.

Additionally, the calling for new public knowledge and thought of working towards a 'greater good' may impact on a researcher's ability to show this respect, as just outlined, to individuals within a research project. (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Mutch, 2005).

It clearly seems that all issues, from the major ones of seeking informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to privacy, to dignity, protection from embarrassment or other forms of harm, right down to the very valid question of whether a random survey would be a waste of 3 minutes time for an individual, can all be minimised by simply taking the role of the other (Flick 2006, Tolich & Davidson 1999). As such, the recurring question for this researcher, throughout the research process and beyond, is simply 'how would I want to be treated in this situation?' With this held at the forefront of all research methodology for this project, then the likelihood is that not only will the research be ethical, there is a good chance that every participant will be treated with the respect they deserve.

This chapter outlines the researcher background, the justification for this project and expands the research questions. Additionally, this chapter then explains the qualitative methods employed, the data analysis undertaken and closes with the limitations inherent with this research.

3.2 - Researcher Background:

The researcher has been involved with secondary education for the last seven years. This period has allowed various roles within two schools in response to both school need and individual interest. Importantly, the researcher has spent considerable time and effort looking for a means to provide systems for differentiated education within existing secondary structures. Whilst this has been primarily involved with provisions for gifted students, the researchers' long term view has been for differentiated provisions for all secondary students. Through this work, along with personal study and involvement with I-Net, this researcher is intrigued with the concepts of personalising learning and how these could lead to a transformation of New Zealand secondary schools.

Additionally, the researcher may also be well placed to conduct this research, not just in terms of interest and appropriateness, but also in terms of personal development with regard to future leadership roles in New Zealand education. Whilst this serves a purpose that is wholly selfish, in terms of completing work which may assist with such roles in the future, it is perhaps not unfair to suggest that this type of undertaking and the subsequent knowledge gained is better done in advance than after the fact.

3.3 - Research Justification:

Personalising Learning seems to be gaining popularity as a legitimate pedagogical approach (Hargreaves, D. 2006, Hartley, 2007, Keamy et al, 2007). The New Zealand Curriculum, whilst not specific in the mention of a personalised approach, is clear in its principles which should underpin all school decisions. Namely, that a student and their family become more connected with their educational choices, that the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi be acknowledged as a founding document and that school curriculum (therefore teachers and school leaders) be future focused.

These principles put students at the centre of teaching and learning, asserting that they should experience a curriculum that engages and challenges them, is forward looking and inclusive, and affirms New Zealand's unique identity (Ministry of Education 2007a, p.9).

This statement seems closely related to the basics of Personalised learning which involve student choice, a flexible and broad curriculum, family engagement in the education system and consultative practices between schools, families and students (Hargreaves, D. 2006). These principles underpinning the New Zealand Curriculum are cited as compelling reasons as to why a study of principals' perspectives on personalised learning may be an important aspect to research in New Zealand's current educational landscape.

Whilst principals perspectives are not the only factors that influence significant and sustainable change in schools (Fullan, 2003), there is little doubt that their influence with regard to staff, students and the wider school community is such that they can bring to bear direct influence with regard to the future direction of the school (Morrison, 2006). In this respect, although there are a myriad of research angles and viewpoints that could be undertaken with regard to personalised learning, it seems appropriate to start with secondary school principals.

3.4 - Research Questions:

Contemporary academic writers such as Gilbert (2005), Hood (1998), Caldwell (2006) along with Fullan and Hargreaves (1998) all express sentiments that our traditional form of 'production line' schooling needs to be in the process of transformational change to bring schools into line with a rapidly changing social and economic world. With the New Zealand government seemingly expressing a similar rhetoric, it would seem appropriate that New Zealand principals would be giving some thought to how their schools will implement, or indeed cope, with these changes.

This research intended to raise three main questions for secondary principals:

1. How do they conceptualise personalised learning?
2. How is this enacted within their schools currently?
3. How do they intend leading transformational changes for the future?

Participants were involved in three semi-structured interviews conducted at staggered intervals. The intervals were designed to serve a consolidative and reflective purpose both for the participant and the researcher. The initial interval was intended to allow enough time to consider and consolidate the general understandings of personalised learning which were then followed by the final interview over a longer period to allow a period of reflection

upon elements of participant responses. However, the practical realities of a principal's life did lead to a 'best fit' in terms of the interview timings. All participants followed a similar format in terms of three distinct sets of interview questions; however two of the interviews were conducted consecutively due to time restraints. For all participants though, an interval of at least a week was adhered to for the purpose of reflection and preparation for the final semi-structured interview.

3.5 - Qualitative Methodology:

Semi-structured interviews in a one to one situation were utilised for this research project. Both the researcher and participant worked from a list of predetermined questions. The advantage of a semi structured process over other methods, such as a questionnaire or formal interview was the opportunity it gave to both researcher and participant to explore in depth and detail the substantive issues with regard to personalised learning and transformational changes that are possibly inherent with this. The semi-structured nature provided the freedom to dynamically respond to the flow of the discussion as it occurred and to explore other relevant avenues as the meeting progressed (Bishop, 1997, Candinin & Connelly, 2000). As a result, this methodology allowed the researcher to explore themes not suggested by the structure of the interview as originally planned; this freedom and flexibility is an important difference from structured interviews.

A semi-structured interview was thus seen as allowing for a frank and open conversation which meant the researcher and participant could respond and explore differing avenues during the interview. One of the major disadvantages of this approach was the likelihood of researcher bias affecting the responses of the participants. As a passionate advocate for personalised learning, the researcher needed to be careful to ensure his own views did not 'colour' the participant responses (Bishop, 1997, Cohen & Manion, 1994).

This was of particular concern as the key research parameters sought to discover the individual principals' perspectives rather than seeking

responses that held some commonality with the views of the researcher. To overcome this, it seemed appropriate to be up front and honest about the researchers' current beliefs about personalised learning. In effect, rather than try to play a distant or impartial part, the researcher tried to ensure from the very start that the Principals understood that it was their voice sort, regardless of what opinions the researcher might hold. This seemed in line with the intent of the research to engage Principals in dynamic conversation about personalised learning. A researcher still needs to play an active part in any research interview, not to the extent that the researcher dominates discussion and the participant becomes passive, but not so little that the participant may feel uncomfortable or that the researcher is disinterested (Kvale, 1996). In effect, the task for the researcher was to provide a framework in which the participants could respond in a way that represented accurately and thoroughly their points of view. This framework of questions was provided to the participants prior to and during the interview to guide the process (Appendix II).

Utilising the format of semi-structured interviews across a multiple time frame was aimed to produce a lot of detailed data within the small number of cases, and as such provide a greater depth of detail. The envisaged strength of this type of methodology is that it attempted to depict the fullness of experience in a meaningful and comprehensive way rather than generalise across a large number of participants.

3.6 - Data Analysis:

Ultimately, researchers are faced with the task of making sense of the qualitative data that they have received from participants; "to reach for understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of certainty usually associated with analysis" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 11). In a small scale project such as this, it would seem that any degree of certainty would be very small indeed, however as the research does not seek to be representative of all schools and principals, it seems reasonable to make interpretations and draw conclusions provided the narratives of the participants are reported in as rich and detailed manner as possible.

The reporting of the qualitative data in this manner should allow a reader to engage with the particular position or scenario of the participants. In line with this, the intent of the subsequent analysis should not be regarded as a definitive summation of 'what is', but rather as an invitation to the reader to engage in further conversation about the research interpretations and topic.

3.7 - Limitations:

In a theoretical sense, all social research is limited simply by the reality that it is impossible to research all of the people all of the time. Humans, and by association their views and constructs of the world around them, are complex and constantly in a state of flux (Bell, 2005). To research a selection of people at any given time can only be a snapshot of that time and selection.

By focusing on just principals' perspectives, this research is inherently limited by the choice to exclude other stakeholders from the research process. This decision was based essentially on a premise of greatest insight versus research manageability for the sole researcher over a short period of time. However, due to the complexity of schools and the world in general, to draw on select perspectives is to severely limit the research (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000). An individual, no matter how perceptive, is unlikely to be able to view things from all perspectives. For a qualitative research project such as this, the wider and richer the perspectives to be gained would have been advantageous. However, as perhaps in most cases of limited research resources, seeking the principals' perspectives seemed a fair and effective start point for this discussion around personalised learning.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research consists in seeing what everyone else has seen, but thinking what no one else has thought (anon).

4.1 - Introduction:

The four principals involved in this research all lead state funded secondary schools. Two were relatively new to principal-ship, having spent less than three years in their respective roles whilst the other two had each served their school communities for more than ten years. Using gender neutral pseudonyms, Ashley, an experienced principal, heads a single sex urban school with 1900 students. Alex, similarly experienced, leads a semi-rural co-ed school with 650 students. Kerry, as a relatively new principal, is in charge of a co-ed school of 1100 students whilst Kelly, also as a new principal, leads a single sex urban school of 1750 students.

This chapter follows the three research questions in order and attempts to highlight the key findings for each that the participants collectively viewed as critical aspects of personalising learning. The principals' perspectives of what underpins personalised learning falls under three headings; firstly, that effective partnerships between the student, teacher and home are critical to improving educational outcomes. Secondly, that an improved knowledge of meta-cognitive understanding is required, not just by teachers but also by students to allow them to make knowledgeable choices about their learning and to then be able to relate or voice this to their teachers. Thirdly, that

personalising learning requires a student centric approach as opposed to regulated programs of work.

Examples within the schools which the principals cited as indicative of personalised learning includes having as wide a range of subject options as possible, focusing on careers guidance for students, the use of Tutor groups and Houses for student support and utilising homeroom environments for low or high ability students.

Lastly, in expressing their views on Leadership for the future, the principals in this research project expressed the need for a clear and collective vision within schools, a rigorous research foundation to strategic decisions and the need for time and patience to implement effective change within their schools.

In the spirit of personalising education, the findings have been deliberately laid out with extensive use of the principals own voices to assist with a central purpose of this research in terms of developing the conversations surrounding personalising learning.

4.2 - Principals Perspectives of Personalised Learning:

1. *Personalising Learning is about relationships and partnerships.*

The principals researched seemed to express the view that a positive relationship between the student and teacher is a critical element of personalising learning. They suggested that having this educational relationship was critical to engaging students in the learning process. As the principals put it,

“Personalised means engaging in the first instance. This is about being relevant. I don’t believe it’s any one size fits all. Underpinning all of that is relationship stuff. That’s the key that matters to the [students] (Kelly).”

It’s the whole engagement mantra. Engaging kids in school and in the classroom with you as a teacher. That’s quite relevant to what I understand personalising learning is. (Ashley)

[Engagement] is an incredibly important part of the Personalised learning approach as unless you’ve got those strong, positive working relationships between the student and the staff member then effective learning is not going to happen (Kerry).

This is consistent with the findings from Bishop et al (2003) that demonstrated an 81% student response regarding the importance of relationships to student performance. Whilst this study was of year 9 and 10 Maori students and formed a central basis for the Te Kotahitanga (TK) project, it is interesting that whilst only one of the researched schools was involved with the TK project, all principals seemed to clearly express the need for developing classroom relationships with all students as a distinct principle for personalising learning and improving learning outcomes for students.

However, the idea of effective relationships between student and teacher seemed to be consistently followed by that of a more developed partnership and increased involvement between the students' family and the school. Whilst all acknowledged that they have some distance to travel before this becomes a reality, parental involvement formed a key aspect with regard to their perspectives of what underpins personalised learning and how this would affect a students' opportunity for success.

Kerry put this most clearly:

Partnership is important. One of the things we've been trying to do a lot of is to encourage our parents, caregivers to be more involved with their sons and daughters. Encourage parents, caregivers to be involved with the school as much as possible. The more we can get our parents and caregivers on board, the greater the chances for our kids to have that success. That individualised success (Kerry).

This viewpoint is consistent with New Zealand research in terms of improving educational outcomes for students. John Hattie (2009) and Adrienne Alton-Lee (2003) both suggest that the influence of the family has valuable effects on student outcomes. In addition, findings from the Flaxmere School Project (Clinton et al, 2007), conducted in a primary setting, demonstrated significant improvements in student outcomes when the school actively worked to involve parents in their child's education. The principals in this study seemed to be largely united in this view of personalising learning as requiring an increased involvement of parents in secondary education beyond sports days and parent evenings:

I've been doing a lot of thinking around engaging the parents more in the learning of their child. We're really good at getting them to help out with sports and camps and all of that, so engaged in that sense with our community, but I think we could do more in terms of engaging parents with the learning of their child. But that's probably where I see it going – One student, one parent at a time. We have our parent evenings, parent council meetings, but there is nothing like that one to one and I think that needs to be personalised. (Alex)

Alex appears to suggest an extension from developing not just the classroom relationship, but also to relationships that includes the caregivers. However, these principals suggested that this may be a major challenge as they perceived the current general mindset of caregivers may be an actual barrier to effective home/school partnerships in secondary education. As an example, Ashley suggested that:

When you talk about personalising learning, it requires quite an intellectual shift by parents to understand it. To understand that they have a role in making decisions about it. I feel a lot of our parents wouldn't feel qualified for this.

(Ashley)

If this is the case, it may account for research from New Zealand (Bishop et al, 2003) which indicated that very few (in fact, none in the study) students perceive their school and parents as working together to assist their education. Whilst there are many factors that may influence this, it could be that educators themselves, inadvertently or deliberately, may propagate this view of parents being uninformed or unqualified to make such decisions regarding their child's secondary education (Gunter, 2001, Harrison, 2004). Yet, as Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) suggest, it could also be that parents may also hold views of education and educators, based on what they experienced at school, which may not necessarily be in the best interest of students today nor be conducive to forming such partnerships. Whilst this may occur for a variety of reasons which are outside the scope of this study, a common and apparent theme was that regardless of external factors, these principals recognised that parents want to do what is best for their child:

I mean, I haven't yet met a parent who doesn't want their kid to succeed. I haven't yet met a person who says that.

But what I have met is people who aren't sure about what to do.

It's about building that capacity, within the staff for a start as it is not something they are used to. It's about building the capacity in the kids in terms of involving their parents. It's about building that capacity with parents themselves and then with the wider community. [Personalising learning] will not work unless we have every part of that system around that student working together (Kerry).

The principals researched indicated that building or developing this partnership capacity, from the classroom to the community, was a challenge that faces them now and in the future. Whilst suggesting that this may be less of a challenge for some schools, in particular private or state integrated, the increased involvement of parents appeared to be seen as a critical element of personalised learning. In this respect, personalised learning may actually require a differing role from educators with regard to changing or enhancing the perceived roles and knowledge of all those involved in our education system (Caldwell, 2006). The principals in this study seemed to acknowledge this in terms of the need to develop meta-cognitive understandings as a critical element for personalising learning.

2. Personalising Learning requires Meta-cognitive understandings.

In the context of developing effective relationships between the teacher and student, these principals seemed to consistently raise comments around providing choice within boundaries. An element of choice is seen as a key for personalised learning from the researched principals and from literature (Humphreys 2008, Jeffs, 2008, Leadbeater, 2008), however a significant finding was that this choice needs to be of an *informed* nature revolving around the *students'* ability to recognise and then relate their own learning needs and desires. In this sense, the term meta-cognition is being used in the context of the awareness that a person may need to have of their own educational processes and their subsequent ability to monitor and direct themselves to desired ends.

It seems that there is a general perspective from these principals that for personalising learning to be effective, there must be a greater understanding, from both teachers and students, of assessment for learning, learning to learn and future directions. In this respect, the key competencies of the new curriculum appear to be seen as a vehicle for developing this knowledge and as having a distinct synergy with a pedagogy for personalised learning. Kelly explained:

I see the [key] competencies that are embodied there and the values as being central to personalised learning. If the learner can develop those competencies then I think they'll be able to understand what their needs are in terms of learning and then we as a school need to be providing the support for them to achieve whatever goals they have for their own (Kelly).

Within these key competencies, the concept of student voice seemed to play a key role in the discussions regarding personalised learning, not so much as a distinct and separate element of personalisation as suggested by literature (Leadbeater, 2008) but as an integral part of formative assessment, student feedback, curricular or programme development and as a potential catalyst for change in teaching pedagogy:

You can't do assessment for learning well unless you're prepared to listen to the voice of the students and give the student that individual feedback and feed forward, they are very linked. As we've developed in our own understanding of assessment for learning practices the student voice has been coming through more and more clearly as we go through that. I think that this is important because it links so strongly with the revised New Zealand curriculum document. But it's also something that, from earlier conversations, if you can teach students to learn then how powerful does that get? (Alex).

The suggestions for increasing meta-cognitive understandings, to enable *informed* decisions to be reached, seems to link with the concepts inherent

with developing effective partnerships and negotiating desired educational outcomes for an individual student. However, the principals did all suggest that for students (and caregivers) to be making these informed decisions about their learning, they will need support, guidance and flexibility from their teachers. To this end, it seemed to be clear that for personalised learning to exist there needs to be an increased awareness from secondary teachers about meta-cognition, pedagogical assessment and relationship practices as opposed to the more traditional secondary approach of relying on subject expertise. Kerry and Kelly seemed to clearly suggest that this may be a major shift required of secondary teachers;

Our challenge over the next 2 or 3 years is to say “well, [subject] knowledge isn’t the source of power [in the classroom]. Pedagogical knowledge, knowing how to teach and to get learning to occur, is power.” (Kelly)

If you were to stand back and see what is happening in schools in terms of learning and the learning process, we are going through a radical shift right now. Probably the biggest shift in fifty years.

Unfortunately the teachers have come from a different type of learning environment and probably have been successful in that way.

To meet the actual needs of the student we have to have a look at how we can alter our teaching to meet their needs as opposed to simply teaching and to fill them up with whatever it is we’re teaching them. So the biggest challenge is with the teachers themselves, not within the students. (Kerry)

In placing this challenge into a distinctly New Zealand educational context, it appears that a focus on developing the understandings and ability for students and caregivers to make such informed decisions could be interpreted within at least two of the three main principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as outlined by the literature from Bishop and Glynn (1999). The ability to make decisions with regard to learning may be a crucial part of an individual's self-determination (Tino Rangitiratanga). It would also seem that teachers developing their understandings as to what learning or knowledge is regarded as valuable or relevant to students and their caregivers (Taonga tuku iko) seems likely to lead to increased student engagement (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, Gilbert, 2005).

Whilst these principals were unanimously quiet about any potential link between the Treaty of Waitangi and personalising learning, the principals seemed united in suggesting that a distinct shift in New Zealand secondary school thinking is required if personalising learning is to be a reality, especially with regard to increasing the ability of students and parents to make informed choices about their education. This carries an expectation of subsequent improvements in student engagement as a result of improved meta-cognitive understandings and their ability to influence or negotiate provisions best suited for them. It also leads to a change of focus in secondary schools from being subject centred to student centric.

3. *Personalising Learning requires a change of focus from program centric to student centric*

Negotiating individual provisions with informed students and parents appears to demand a significantly different approach to secondary schooling than what has traditionally been offered in New Zealand. The researched principals appeared to clearly indicate that New Zealand secondary school teachers have been mostly programme centred and that these programmes are generally designed to instruct students, as homogenous groups rather than individual students, about their specific subject area. Without exception, the principals seemed to express the sentiment that this is no longer the way forward for education and that a mind shift away from program or teacher centred thinking is required for personalised learning to exist. Ashley explained using a distinct metaphor:

To make it a real genuine reality would take a mind shift on the part of the teachers more than they have taken so far. We do have this traditional view of the teacher being the sun with the students spinning around like little planets with the teacher controlling the students by - I don't know- gravity. It will take a shift where the student becomes the sun more (Ashley).

These sentiments are directly in line with the general principle of personalising learning in terms of placing students at the heart of educational delivery systems (Hopkins, 2007). However, this was seen by

these principals as a significant shift for many teachers currently in the secondary school system, particularly in terms of curriculum development and class planning.

One of the big shifts with the new curriculum is for teachers to see themselves as curriculum developers and to understand that they now have the responsibility to develop a curriculum in the classroom that meets the needs of each learner. That's a shift from 'here it is all written up and I'm going to teach this and my jobs done.' This shift from being a curriculum implementer to developer, meeting the needs of kids, is quite a huge shift for teachers to come to grips with (Alex).

This changing role for teachers also seemed to question the perceptions of secondary schooling itself. A shift may also be required that is moving away from schools being seen as a traditional place to 'get qualifications' in a limited number of academic subjects. In this regard, expanding the available opportunities for students within the schools seemed to be seen as an element of personalising by the principals and a way forward for education. Both Kelly and Kerry seemed clear in their views that personalised learning is a shift away from the traditional 'get qualifications' thinking:

That's what personalising learning is about to me. So firstly it's about raising the desire, or setting the vision or setting the goals, getting them to want that (indicates high level). Then giving them the knowledge, the skills and the support to get there. Not just to accumulate 80 credits and I've got level one NCEA, but saying, hey, I

want to do this so therefore what do I need, how can I gather that stuff? So the challenge is for systems in schools to cope, and the challenge is for the teacher in front of thirty boys and girls to provide that (Kelly).

I think the whole concept of going to school, where it is a little bit like a factory, that concept is gone, we've got to get rid of it, unfortunately it is a hangover, but we have to push the idea of meeting the needs of every single student, every students learning needs to enable them to get where they want to go in life (Kerry).

This suggests a requirement for developing the breadth of curricular opportunities available for students to make informed choices about. However, this breadth also suggests that personalising learning is also about developing the ability of teachers to provide a flexibility of provisions within the classroom for individual students. The researched principals collectively spoke about a change in pedagogy as being required to achieve this, in particular as something similar to those understandings as held by primary trained teachers. In terms of specific methods, only Ashley was forthcoming in suggesting a specific approach which may assist personalising learning:

Our gifted program is based loosely from the George Betts Autonomous Learner program, which doesn't mention personalised learning but that's essentially what it is based on. Based on students becoming developed personalised learners and that because we use that in the Advanced learning class it filters through the whole school

in terms of staff awareness. The staff understands that we are rethinking the way in which we approach the whole teaching and learning act. We talk of Autonomous learners which is really just a personalised learner. [The student has] a sense of autonomy over [their] own choices and pathway, reasons why and understanding the learning process, learning how to learn, how to be a better learner.

(Ashley)

Whilst based on provisions for gifted students, this does suggest a potential pedagogical approach for developing the meta-cognitive understandings of students and allowing for flexible provisions to occur within the classroom. Ashley does not suggest that this is *the* way to create personalised learning, however it does seem to provide a specific reference point to investigate how a pedagogical change from program centred thinking to student centred may be developed.

Developing such changes leads to questions about how these elements of personalised learning are currently enacted within these schools. The next section explores how these schools view themselves in terms of developing partnerships, meta-cognitive understandings and shifting towards a more student centric approach as integral components of personalised learning.

4.3 - Current Examples viewed as Personalising Learning

1. Increased option choices.

As a step towards increasing the available opportunities for students to make informed choices, it appeared that having as wide range of options available was seen by these principals as an example of personalising learning.

One of our strengths is we allow any [student] to choose any program [they] want. They're not constrained by their subject choice or by the level of choice. NCEA works in favour of the system fitting the learner as you can craft a choice within a subject – they don't have to do all the course, they can do parts of courses or combinations of level 1 and 2 during year. That's an aspect of creating a program that suits the learner rather than just having to fit into the system (Ashley).

We've gone to an 8 line option timetable structure so our year 1, in the main, do 8 subjects. The idea was we're trying to open up choice as the previous structure tended to narrow it down so if there were line clashes the choices weren't there for the kids. (Alex)

These views seem to be in line with literature from the United Kingdom which suggests that a wide choice of curriculum is essential for Personalised Learning (Hargreaves, D, 2006) and perhaps also lends weight to the ministry view that the current NCEA system supports a

personalised environment (Sewell, 2007). A wider option choice for students appears to demand some form of change in traditional structures, such as the timetable, and the subsequent organisation of the school. These changes or added provisions may be as a result of these schools' attempts to personalise the learning experience for their students. However, the increase of option choices also created the need for students to be able to make informed choices about their educational pathways. This need for informed student choices seemed to lead to a greater emphasis on personal guidance for students in these schools.

2. Emphasis on careers guidance

Guidance was seen as a particularly important part of personalising learning, especially in terms of students being able to make informed choices about their educational direction with regard to their option choices. The researched principals claimed to have strong guidance counselling systems which focused on the individual career pathways for students and how their current education could assist them on that pathway.

We've trained two of our staff with Post Grad careers qualifications, so for a school our size we have two full-time trained staff. The reality is that one is teaching a couple of accounting classes, but never the less that's a lot of hours to give for that. I guess we've done what we could in terms of throwing staffing into that as it is so critical (Alex).

Every student in this school gets career education. Each year level has a careers counsellor who interviews the students. And school becomes a way of helping students to get where they want to go. Getting past this whole idea of school being, for some students, a holding pen before they can actually go out and do what they want to do (Kerry).

This seems to demonstrate a clear link between students making informed decisions about their education and how these provisions can assist the students with achieving their own long term goals.

The guidance role of schools and teachers in supporting students, and by extension caregivers, appears to be in assisting with the knowledge and understandings required to allow the students to make such informed choices. The need to include caregivers in the process seemed to be clearly expressed by these principals. As a step towards this guidance and home contact, it appeared that these principals held the tutor groupings as being another example of personalised learning to assist with personal support for students and caregivers.

3. Tutor Groups

In addition to individual career guidance, the researched principals also suggested having tutor groups was an example of personalised support for students along with providing for a 'point of contact' between the home and the school. The concept of having vertically aligned tutor groups and keeping a consistent tutor teacher throughout a student's time at school seemed a consistent thread to help create a family atmosphere to develop a more personalised environment for the student. In this sense, the role of tutors was not just for guidance but also specifically to assist with the development of an effective relationship between the school, the student and, to some degree, the home.

We've gone back to vertical form classes, we went horizontal for one year and I came back and changed it again. I'd like to think that as we go through the voyage of [students] staying with the same form teacher, that at yr 13 they've got the same form teacher and that's a relationship. (Kelly).

Of interest, one school had trialled this, but then reverted to an opposite system of horizontal alignment across the respective year levels as it did not fit well with their existing pastoral care system:

Last year we actually had vertical form classes with a view to developing the whanau type relationship within the form class. But at the end of the year, when we evaluated it, although there were

positives that come out of it, one of the things we did lose was our [existing] pastoral system. We have a very strong dean's network and trying to get around 36 classes to talk to the kids made it very difficult (Kerry).

Whilst these decisions about whether to utilise vertical or horizontal tutor groups are situational in nature, it seems that the common desired outcome is one of pastoral support for the individual students. In this regard, it is notable that one of the schools had gone further than the traditional form of the tutor class system to better provide this personalised guidance or support. Alex explained the significantly different approach and undertaking that had been made to their tutor group system as a direct attempt to better personalise the experience for students:

The river-groups that we've set up is [an example of] personalising in terms of that individual support for students. That's such a big focus for us this year so that's the best example. What we've done is split the school into groups of 12 students and each of those have a river guide. Because of the number of river groups we use support staff as well as teaching staff. I have my own river group. Their job is really to be that one adult in that kid's life that takes an interest in their learning and their life. Looks after them, mentors them and monitors their learning progress.

I guess it's based on that research if one child has one adult who knows them well through these college years their chances of making it grows exponentially. I think the trigger was knowing, or

beginning to understand, it is one student at a time, and in form classes of 25 to 30 that meet for ten minutes in a morning, it was too many in the group to take an individual interest in the child in that sense (Alex).

This suggests that to personalise the guidance for students, careful consideration needs to be given to the number of students and the available time for tutors to be able to effectively provide that guidance and support. Without supporting evidence from the employees within this school, it is only possible to surmise that a collaborative and trusting culture would need to exist to undertake such a shift to share this responsibility amongst all staff. Knowing a student well seems linked with the concept of home rooms for particular students which was also expressed by three of these principals as another current example of personalising learning.

4. Home Rooms.

Three of the schools expressed the use of home room type situations as examples of personalising learning for their students. In each case, although altering between remedial, gifted and inquiry learning classes, the principals seemed to express the opinion that having students of similar abilities grouped with a single teacher for a longer period of time than is usual in secondary structures was more likely to result in education being personalised for these students. This teacher, in a home room setting, covered a breadth of the curriculum subjects, and as such, it is interesting that two of the principals expressed the opinion that primary trained teachers have advantages in this role as a result of their training. In this regard, they suggested that the pedagogical understandings of primary trained teachers may be more attuned to providing a breadth of knowledge in a differentiated environment, as opposed to secondary teacher training that may focus more on subject specific knowledge.

We have sixty year nine and ten boys together in a home room situation. They had one teacher last year who covered the curriculum was the intention. It was focused on a rich question and they would go into an enquiry process, working together, and hopefully cover the curriculum but also develop their research skills and hopefully that met a few of the challenges around personalised learning. This year we have two teachers in there as there was a bit of concern that

maybe we weren't quite covering all the curriculum aspects, didn't have the specialist facilitator, advisor expert that we needed (Kelly). We looked at the possibility of [a homeroom for our lower level students], because that teacher is primary trained, of that class coming together and she would be the teacher of their english, maths and social studies and she could tailor to meet those kids needs by having a more integrated approach. That has come into play at the beginning of this year and has been a fantastic success. It's being able to collapse the timetable, being able to have an integrated approach. It's not restricted to teaching the subject, you're actually teaching the kids and that's a whole different approach (Kerry).

The home room approach seems to clearly demonstrate a shift in pedagogical approach from the traditional secondary school approach of teaching subject specific content to one of student centricity. It is interesting that both Kelly and Kerry seem to suggest that having the ability to alter or collapse the school timetable may have a positive effect on student outcomes. This is backed by educators such as Littky and Grabelle (2004) who suggest that time limited instalments of subject specific learning is actually detrimental to a positive learning experience. A possible remedy to this and as a useful step towards personalising learning, as indicated by these principals, is ensuring adequate access to technology for students.

5. Access to Technology.

Access to computer technology was viewed as a critical component for personalised learning to become a reality in secondary schools. All researched schools had or were in the process of investing heavily in maximising the availability of, primarily, computer technology for their students.

I definitely think we're not going to be able to talk realistically about personalising learning without having the technology to do it. It's definitely a key. (Alex)

I see the development of ICT as critical to personalising learning and we've invested quite a lot of money in going down that track. Where we are heading, we are moving towards computers being available for a lot more students within the school. We are now getting to a critical mass where students can use the tool, and that's all it really is, to help their learning (Kerry).

However, whilst a critical component for personalised learning, it was commonly referred to as being simply a tool for personalisation, rather than an underpinning requirement, which may yet to be fully utilised with regard to provision of educational opportunities for students. As Ashley and Kelly suggested:

[Personalised learning through ICT] depends on the pedagogy of the teacher, in the end. The intention would be that it does. The hope would be that the teachers taking these classes are doing that as that's what it should do. In the department, this should enable the delivery to be more personalised. How much that happens, there is a variance in reality at this stage (Kelly).

I don't think we are really using it to its potential. It has potential but there is a gap in our pedagogical practice. Autonomous learner type programs have a real place here to develop that potential. We need to give learners the opportunity to become better learners to use the ICT. That's the challenge really, to get them to use the tool better, and the curriculum documents go some way towards that really. (Ashley)

This emphasis on the pedagogical practice of the teacher, along with developing the skills and ability of the students to use the tool was a common theme amongst the researched principals. Whether any personalised learning was likely to occur as a result of technological access, in the opinion of these principals, seemed to depend mostly on the pedagogical practice utilised. This seems a direct link with the underpinning principles of personalised learning, as expressed by these principals, in terms of developing meta-cognitive understandings for students that may allow technology to be better utilised for student learning.

This need to develop meta-cognitive understandings may only form a part of the understandings that need to be developed in terms of enacting personalised learning within secondary schools, regardless of the importance of having student access to technology, increased options, personal guidance and the ability of schools to develop specific homeroom situations for certain students.

All principals in this study seemed to express the sentiments that secondary teachers (and schools) are on the cusp of a major paradigm shift for which educators are going to require an increased level of support and assistance from school leaders during such a change. The next section investigates what transformational changes have been attempted within these schools and what critical elements these leaders believe are essential in leading change within their school environment.

4.4 Leadership for transformational change:

Whilst many of the underpinning principles for personalised learning seem to have been well espoused by the principals, in terms of developing partnerships, meta-cognitive understandings and shifting from program to student centric pedagogies, their examples and evidence suggests that little in the way of significant and sustained change has been attempted within their schools (Caldwell, 2006). In fairness this may be expected if, as Keamy (2007) suggests, most western countries are still at an embryonic stage of personalised learning and therefore at the very beginning of such transformational changes. These principals seemed to be in agreement that we are indeed at the start of such a shift in New Zealand education.

The principals appeared to express some commonalities with regard to the values and expectations that principals need to hold to lead both staff and their wider school community through such changes. These were the ability for a school to develop a clear and collective vision, a rigorous research foundation to all decisions and the need for leaders to recognise that change requires time and patience.

1. A Clear and collective vision.

Holding a vision for the future seemed a priority for all principals. Moreover, they expressed the desire that this vision needs to be held collectively by all staff within their schools. In some respects this was seen as somewhat of a challenge to gain this 'buy in' but was nevertheless critical for any change leadership to be effective and sustained. This view is backed by research which suggests that unless a vision is shared, it is unlikely to be sustained long term (Kotter, 1996, MacBeath & MacDonald, 2000). As both Ashley and Kelly stated, this shared vision is important in their schools:

I see no value in a vision owned only by me. It has to be a collective vision. I want a mandate and support. The key to the change in pedagogy is the leaders of learning, or the HOD or HOF. It is the curriculum leaders, in a school this size. I can stand up front of the teachers, they'll sit, they may turn off, they may be engaged. They need a direction and a vision from me, but it is when they are in their departments, working within their curriculum, that I think the greatest change will take place. They have to be convinced that change has to take place. If they are not convinced, then the change isn't going to filter down (Kelly).

The leader has to believe the vision and really be able to talk about the vision to the followers before anything will happen. In New Zealand education too many leaders don't talk about the vision enough, they're not brave enough or not articulate enough. Some

people don't see this as part of their role in leadership – and the teacher is the leader in the classroom (Ashley).

Interestingly, three of the principals appeared to express the view that ministry leadership is a vital part of the change process yet is somewhat lacking. In essence, there seemed to be a feeling that there is a lack of information about the desired directions for New Zealand education and that often such information depends upon which course a principal may attend or what person they may speak to. In this sense, the impression was one of principals being 'left in the dark' to sort out what may be meant by particular curriculum statements or ministry announcements.

In a sense, if the Ministry of Education had a vision, that would be a good start, and there is no sense of this in schools. They talk about a vision, but they don't walk the talk even in the ministry. They need to have a vision and articulate it more rather than just give us these little pages in the curriculum statement with all these little squares all down the page. Our staff still struggle with these. I suppose their mindset is different. To make it work there needs to be a lot more talking and a lot more time devoted to ensure everyone understands (Ashley).

I'm surprised we haven't heard more from the ministry. The little booklet from Steve Maharey sent the antennae up and you go okay, listen up. Then it feels like its gone quite quiet. Even though it's in there in the new Docs, it's not in your face in there. It doesn't feel like were getting very clear statements from the Ministry but whether I've

missed things I don't know. That's why we've gone to the United Kingdom research because it doesn't seem to be coming from New Zealand but I believe the concept to be right (Alex).

This may be an indicator that whilst all the principals seemed to express a support for the new curriculum documents, in particular the key competencies as being advantageous to help personalise learning, there seemed some hesitancy as to whether this work is still a Ministry focus as a result of the ministry 'going quiet' over personalised learning. This hesitancy may have a significant impact as it seems reasonable to suggest that principals and their staff cannot focus or research all elements of education all the time. A form of ministry guidance that clearly suggested the directions required may assist principals in developing the research foundations for future decisions.

2. A rigorous research foundation to decisions

All principals were clear on the need for all decisions and strategies to be based on best evidence. To this end, whilst conscious of the time requirements for reading and deliberation, it seemed evident that they include all staff in their thinking with regard to professional research. Ensuring a rigorous research base to guide decision making seems to be synonymous with both the idea of developing a collective vision and also with their comments regarding informed choice.

I think there is need to lead change through an evidence based environment. What we try to do is provide staff with what research is showing, a lot more information like that, so they become aware of the need for change. I think that brings about an opportunity for people to see that this is an opportunity; this isn't just challenging who I am. Then there is a desire for that change to take place and that then needs to be supported. It is giving them a starting point but letting them go and giving them the opportunity for their own research and development (Kerry).

This 'development' of people through a rigorous research foundation may indicate that 'unlearning', in terms of being able and willing to let go of deep seated behaviours and beliefs (McWilliams, 2002), may be an essential component for transformational leadership in New Zealand.

The need to be creating an awareness of and desire for change, as part of an educational shift, appeared as a common priority for these principals.

[Leaders] need to make the staff more aware of their changing role.

That probably needs to be the major focus for us at the moment.

We've got good competent staff here - some of them having been doing the same thing for a long time - and it is that mind shift – it's that shift of understanding that we are working slowly through. It is so easy to have this wonderful idea as a principal and say that we are going to do this but it just won't have any impact at all. Teachers, as a breed, are risk adverse. They don't want to be seen as not competent in an area that the world relies on them being good at.

(Ashley).

The need to make teachers aware of their changing role seems to link with leading commentators who suggest that any organisational transformation will depend on internal transformations of the people involved to have any lasting effect (Drucker 2002, Kotter, 1996, Senge, 2006). As Ashley clearly suggested, principals could have all the best ideas for education but if these are not properly understood by staff they are unlikely to be implemented:

We have to realise as principals that we are powerless really. If the staff don't think it is worthwhile, then it isn't going to happen. You have to slowly persuade some of the staff and they infiltrate the next layer and they get persuaded and they see it working and then everyone comes on board in the end. But you have to be patient

(Ashley).

The perceived need to have patience with staff seemed to create an undertone of fatalism from these principals with regard to their ability to influence or create sustainable changes over a short to mid time frame. This recognition of the lengthy time required for change created an impression of teacher resistance, in terms of teachers being uncomfortable with ambiguity or approaches that they have not used themselves and therefore reluctant to trial or maintain such changes. This reluctance suggests a potential barrier to transformational change within secondary education. However, by developing best evidence understandings from a research base it seems that these principals believe that the desire for teachers to take such changes upon themselves may be developed. In this regard though, these principals indicated that it requires both time and patience for any change to occur in a secondary school environment.

3. Time and Patience.

The expectation of transformational change being over a long period of time was echoed by all principals in the study. The shift required within their schools was explained by Ashley in reference to the 'flywheel' effect as suggested by Jim Collins (2001):

The flywheel effect that Good to Great talks about. You get that flywheel or momentum going and it becomes easier. Once you get the flywheel going it's easier because you get time to think about what you're trying to do. (Ashley)

In this respect, it seems the principals viewed any transformational changes as being small pushes of the flywheel which will then gather momentum over time.

You actually have to be patient. I tend to like to get things done like this - (snap). But you have to take your time and, I think, gradually grow the critical mass that is there. Like the implementation of ICT. Just the gradual, you win a few people over, you move forward (Kelly).

The common referencing to time seemed to suggest the importance of ensuring a collaborative approach to change was developed within these schools. Additionally, these principals appeared to approach any changes with caution to ensure that any changes made were conducted with a depth

of both research and common understandings to ensure the longevity of any such change. As Kerry suggested, teachers are going through significant changes at present and they need to be both challenged and supported at the same time:

From day one I explained to the teachers that part of my responsibility was to challenge them and challenge their way of thinking and I will do that in a supportive environment however, but it is about challenging their thinking to changing what a teacher really is as opposed to teaching the subject, they are teaching the students and that includes the parents being involved as well. Teachers are going through a considerable change right now. And they've got to be supported through that change. It has got to be done in a way that it is a permanent change for the better. That there is a shift to bring everyone along with you. It is easy enough to shift those people who are the early adopters, but it is making sure that all staff are comfortable in moving together. And it does take time and it takes time for the parents and community as well (Kerry).

These principals seemed to speak with a unanimous voice that any sustained educational changes are only likely to occur over a long duration of time. What period of time these principals regarded as a long duration was unfortunately not clarified in this research. However, the general impression appeared to be one of cautious implementation of any change to ensure that it is well received and understood by all people within their educational community. Alex referred to this in terms of implementing

change at a rate that does not induce “speed wobbles” for the school environment which may create an educational instability which would not be conducive to positive student outcomes. Avoiding the ‘speed wobbles’ seems a direct link with literature which suggests a modern principal, in a paradoxical fashion, must lead tumultuous change yet also provide educational stability (Day et al, 2000). This also suggests that the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership may not be exclusive of each other but are in fact complementary (Bass & Avolio, 1993). An effective leader may be able to act in a transformational manner but still provide transactional leadership to ensure the day to day educational operations remain effective.

4.5 - Summation of findings:

It seems that the researched principals espoused understandings of what personalising learning may mean that are closely aligned to those suggested by current literature. In addition to this, they all suggested a distinct support for a personalised approach to education, in terms of the underpinning principles, even if not using the particular terminology within their schools. As Kelly suggested;

“My own personal feeling is that personalised learning is the key to education.”

The underpinning principles of personalising learning seemed to fall within three broad areas:

Firstly, effective partnerships between the student, teacher and home are critical to improving educational outcomes. Within this, developing relationships and creating engaged learners were seen as an essential part of personalised learning.

Secondly, that an improved knowledge of meta-cognitive understanding is required, not just by teachers but also by students to allow them to make knowledgeable choices about their learning and to then be able to relate or voice this to their teachers. In this respect, meta-cognition appears to be seen as an awareness that students may have of their own educational processes and their subsequent ability to monitor and direct themselves to desired ends.

Thirdly, that personalising learning requires a student centric approach as opposed to regulated programs of work for students to fit into. In a New Zealand secondary school context, the researched principals seemed to suggest that this may be one of the major challenges to making personalised learning more of a reality.

In practice however, current forms of personalised learning appeared to only be happening for select groups within the schools. In very general terms, the high or low ability students were often separated into home room type settings with teachers having specific skill sets to allow them to better 'tailor' or 'personalise' an education appropriate for those students. This skill set, although largely undefined, seemed to be referred to, by both Kerry and Kelly, as similar to the pedagogical understandings held by primary trained teachers. Ashley, on the other hand, clearly suggested that the skill sets required by students, for personalised learning to occur, was very similar to that of the George Betts autonomous learner program which encourages negotiated learning and independent student work.

All four schools, as part of what the principals suggested as examples of personalising learning, espoused a strong focus on guidance. Primarily, this appeared to focus on careers which seemed to link closely with senior option choices, although all principals did comment on the importance of regular individual guidance for students throughout their secondary school years.

This guidance was generally provided through tutor or form teachers along with support from year level deans. In this area, only one of the principals had made any radical change to school structures, in terms of creating small 'river groups' in place of the traditional tutor groups, to focus specifically on the individual guidance of all students.

In regard to significant change, whilst all principals suggested that education was in the midst of a needed change, there seemed little evidence yet of transformational change such as that described by literature. In contrast, a commonality amongst principals seemed to suggest that small incremental changes over a long period of time would be how they were approaching such shifts. In this regard, it appeared that the Principals described any changes towards personalising learning for students as most likely to only initially occur within the confines of existing traditional school structures to ensure that all staff is prepared to accept and understand such changes.

The next chapter discusses these principal's views of the principles underpinning personalising learning, critiques the given examples of personalising learning and lastly, investigates the attributes for successful transformational leadership as expressed by these principals.

CHAPTER FIVE – RESEARCH DISCUSSION:

*You cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.
(Mark Twain)*

5.1 - Introduction:

Educationalists the world over are suggesting that the nature of schooling is upon the very brink of substantial change (Caldwell, 2006, Fullan, 2003, Gilbert, 2005, Hargreaves, A, 2007, Hood, 1998). The principals in this research project appear to agree with this premise which suggests that Caldwell's (2006) contention that we must re-imagine our schools for the future may be timely. However, Twain's quote above is noteworthy as we try to reconsider what it is that schools should be doing. Discussion around education appears to be a highly emotive subject and one in which the ingrained mental models of how individuals experienced their schooling may possibly obscure their ability to view a future for schools that is significantly divergent from the more traditional modes (Moos, 2000, Senge, 2006).

With this focus in mind, this discussion is based upon the underpinning principles and examples of personalised learning as determined from this research. These are then used as the basis to speculate on what actions or structures school leaders may implement or consider in assisting personalised learning to become a reality for students.

The first section, titled Personalising New Zealand Education, focuses on the three underpinning principles of personalised learning as expressed by the principals involved in this study:

1. Partnerships and Relationships.
2. Meta-cognition.
3. Student Centricity.

This discussion investigates where these principals' perspectives converge with research literature and how this may impact on New Zealand secondary education.

The second section, titled Splicing the Threads, explores each of the examples of personalised learning from the findings with regard to whether they are congruent with all three underpinning principles.

1. Student Options.
2. Guidance and Tutors.
3. Home Rooms.
4. Access to Technology

In each section, interpretations are made of how these examples personalise learning to provide suggestions of shifts that may enhance or develop personalised educational provisions.

The last section, titled *Leading the Way*, revolves around the attributes, as expressed by these principals, which may be required for successful transformational leadership within secondary education.

1. Clear and Collective Vision.
2. Rigorous Research Foundation.
3. Time and Patience.

This discussion explores how these elements may impact on transformational leadership in regard to any shifts towards personalised learning, investigates where these converge with literature and also suggests factors within these three that may assist with successful implementation.

6.1 - Personalising New Zealand Education

To personalise New Zealand education, schools may need to focus on developing the three main underpinning principles as outlined by the principals involved in this research. This section explores where each element of partnership, meta-cognition and student centricity links with existing research and provides suggestions of how these may be developed to improve student outcomes.

Partnerships:

Inherent within partnerships, it would seem that effective relationships must be an elementary and critical component. The researched principals suggest that this is an important key to students which is backed by New Zealand research (Alton-lee, 2003, Clinton et al, 2007, Hattie, 2009) and seems a major focus of the Te Kotahitanga project which has been embraced by many New Zealand schools. However, this may be somewhat limited, with regard to developing partnerships, as the current focus appears to be mainly on relationships within an existing class setting and appears to largely ignore the effect of partnerships for learning that may extend outside the school environment.

Whilst the researched principals were all seemingly clear on the positive effects of parental involvement in a students' education, they seemed less clear on why this is such an important element of personalised learning. In reference to the literature, it may be that developing an intrinsic motivation

to learn, as opposed to external forces that impose forms of knowledge, may be the key justification for developing partnerships in education. This aligns closely with Sergiovanni's (2001) view of developing 'covenantal' educational environments where the learning may be based around a sense of identity, kinship, responsibility, and reciprocity.

It would seem that this form of partnership, as a distinct underpinning element of personalised learning, may demand that teachers take upon themselves a professional responsibility for initiating, developing and maintaining such a partnership between the school and the home. As Sergiovanni (2001) points out, schools are very good at communicating information to the home, but are perhaps limited in their ability to engage parents in conversations about what may best suit an individual child.

Inherent with this concept of conversations with the home, it may also be that teachers should be assisting parents with how they may best educate their own child. If recent New Zealand research is accurate in suggesting that the family environment is a significant modifier in student achievement (Clinton et al, 2007, Hattie, 2009), then this suggests that school leaders should be seeking means to help develop the family environment to assist with student education. This concept of a partnership for learning perhaps recognises that a students' total educational environment, including elements external to the school, are critical to student outcomes (Coxon et al, 1994, Fraser and McGee, 1994,).

The need to develop the professional capacity of teachers in developing a partnership to improve the learning of each individual outside the classroom seemed to be clearly expressed during this research, however there appeared to be little clear evidence of this shift occurring. In contrast, whilst the home/school partnership is definitely encouraged through school literature and by the researched principals, it appears that any parental contact with the researched schools, other than specific issues that may arise or planned parent/teacher evenings, is largely left to the parents to initiate. This involvement of parents in the teaching process may be a distinct shift and one alluded to by the researched principals in terms of teachers having to learn to give up their power as a subject authority for one whereby a skilled teacher is one who gets learning to occur by whichever means is best suited to a student. Additionally, it seemed clear that for this to happen then the actual skills and capabilities of teachers will need to be specifically developed to be able to educate outside their subject knowledge.

Whilst redeveloping teacher skills is a seemingly major undertaking, the recommendation from this research would be to start with the retraining of secondary teachers, to become educational professionals capable and comfortable with developing professional relationships at a personal level with the student and their caregivers.

Meta-cognition:

If students are to develop an awareness of their own educational processes along with an ability to monitor and direct themselves to desired ends, then it seems appropriate that teachers also must develop these same understandings, be able to provide guidance towards these ends and create an environment in which these skills are able to be developed and practiced. Whilst the key competencies of the New Zealand curriculum may provide some form of descriptor as to what skills are desirable for students, particularly in terms of developing a 'life long learner', a cohesive pedagogical model of how teachers may specifically develop the meta-cognitive abilities of students does not seem apparent.

A clear pedagogy for secondary schools needs to be developed to assist with the transition from moving students from existing as 'dependent learners' within specific subjects to becoming life long or self directed learners. It may be that this is an essential requirement before we can expect teachers to be able to modify their existing classroom practices (Rossi, 2002). In this respect, the autonomous learner model (ALM) from George Betts was clearly suggested, by one of the principals, as a potential candidate for filling this pedagogical vacuum. Whilst the ALM was developed for a particular target group of students, it may provide a useful basis for teachers to start developing pedagogical understandings that may shift both students and themselves towards developing an educational environment that is based around student initiated learning as opposed to transmission of subject specific information.

In relation to developing the meta-cognitive skills of learners, the research findings seem to imply a shift of focus for secondary schooling is required that may need to marginalise the importance of 'subject specialists' in favour of a focus on pedagogical practices designed to allow students more control of the learning process. As Farahani suggested as a future educational focus;

today's problems cannot be handled with yesterday's solutions and problem solving techniques. The appropriate solutions and techniques do not seem to come from a mind bound to any single discipline. This is not to say that each individual is supposed to know everything, but I believe that the days of individuals who rely on a single field of expertise are numbered (Farahani, 2005, p.515).

This de-emphasise on subject expertise is linked with the suggestion from the research findings that teachers will need to realise that their 'power' in a secondary setting is less likely, in the future, to be as a result of their depth of subject knowledge and needs to be based on their ability to have learning occurring for their students. This seems inextricably linked to pedagogical practices based around developing the meta-cognitive understandings of the students. However, for this to occur it seems obvious that this must first be developed within teachers to enable them to encourage the skills and attributes that 'life long' or 'self directed' learners will need to allow them to engage in personalised learning (Fullan, 2005).

Student Centricity:

Personalised learning appears to demand that any student, as an individual, be placed at the centre of their educational provision (Hartley, 2007). In this regard, it seems difficult for any teacher to plan such provisions without the involvement of the student and caregivers in the planning process. This in itself may be another major shift for teachers in the future, particularly in terms of the common teaching practice of planning and teaching a subject content program, over a specified time period. It appears that teachers may need to become curriculum decision-makers as opposed to simply implementing a set format of knowledge which is required to be covered.

This concept of developing a curriculum in consultation with a student seems intrinsically linked with the notion of having students and caregivers being able to make informed decisions about their educational provisions. This will require a level of expertise from teachers in being able to develop this ability within students and caregivers but then also in being able to provide a form of differentiated learning for individual students, or groups of students, within a classroom environment.

However, if schools themselves are to start with the student and not the subject matter, this may also result in a major shift in the manner in which schools are organised (Littky & Allen, 1999).

Student centricity may demand that a shift occur within the traditional organisational structures rather than just sit as an individual responsibility for teachers. As David Hood succinctly points out, as schools “approach

the 21st century, convention still demands that practices remain for which there are now no logical rhyme or reason" (1998, p. 16). This comment suggests that school leaders may need to question the structures that exist within schools and ask whether they in fact contribute to creating a personalised education system or whether such structures actually impede a student centric approach.

A shift to student centred thinking is a philosophical viewpoint that school leaders themselves need to accept if personalised learning is to be a reality for students. This viewpoint requires a thought process that places any individual student ahead of timetable, teacher, program or organisational demands. Student centricity, in current school environments, demands a high level of courage from school leaders to stand resolute in this direction despite the likelihood of excessive criticism and attempts to undermine such shifts (Fullan, 2003).

This courage to place students first also demands a focus on the principles of partnership and meta-cognition. A focus on any one principle in isolation may have limited positive effects, but only in that specific area which may have little effect on the concept of personalising learning as a whole. Personalised learning may require all three principles working to support each other. The next section explores how schools may splice these threads together.

5.3 - Splicing the Threads:

In using the examples of personalised learning, as interpreted collectively from the researched principals, this section seeks to explore whether the three underpinning principles could further develop the opportunities for student learning. For this purpose, all three principles are interpreted as being synergistic in nature and should not be separated in terms of defining a personalised educational structure. In particular, this section explores whether such examples, as expressed by these principals, are of a potentially transformational nature, as described by Caldwell (2006), and also suggests steps, based upon the researched literature and findings, that may lead to such transformational shifts that may personalise learning for secondary students.

The examples discussed in this section are formed solely from those commonly expressed by the principals during this research. At the forefront is the example of increasing student options to better personalise education, then guidance and tutor groups, the use of home-rooms and finally the importance of increasing the access to technology for students.

Student Options .

Increasing the availability and diversity of options for students may seem to fall clearly into the realm of personalised education, particularly in terms of student choice. However, it appears that these option choices still operate within the confines of traditional option classes with subject specialist teachers who then teach subject content. In this regard, it does not seem that any such shift is of a transformational or personalised nature, especially in terms of any intrinsic change in secondary teachers' pedagogical approaches. If this is the case, it seems unlikely that any major shift will occur with regard to developing the meta-cognitive abilities of students and thereby their ability to co-construct or negotiate their learning outcomes. In a very real sense, opening options without any corresponding change in teaching practice seems simply an exercise of 'more of the same' rather than an integrated effort to personalise learning.

A student centric approach to options could see, in a New Zealand context, the NCEA system being interwoven into all year levels as an available benchmark once a student is ready. The 'readiness' of a student may be able to be interpreted in terms of a students' ability to take responsibility for some facets of their education, particularly in terms of their meta-cognitive ability. By allowing a student to undertake work on the basis of readiness, it suggests a 'stage not age' approach to education, not dissimilar to the environments suggested by the home-room situations where students are able to accelerate or revise at their own pace.

In line with Farahani's (2005) contention of a future shift in thinking from subject specialist to a more generalised approach, it may be that educational structures may need to provide for multiple and diverse options within classes rather than across faculties. By providing this form of differentiation, not just of academic level but also between subjects, a student may be able to consistently work on a curriculum personalised for them. This differentiation does not negate the need for subject specialists within schools. Within a class of students who are taking more responsibility for their learning, the immediacy of the specialist may be able to be reduced in favour of educational resources, particularly technological resources such as pod casts, online classes or other such sources. These forms of resource may allow students to engage in learning of their choice without the need for a subject specialist being present at all times. If this pathway were taken, it seems that options could then be wide open for personalised learning to take place.

An example of such provisions may be found in academy style programs such as vocational trades. Students, whilst largely focused on specific qualifications, may undertake certain mathematics or communications papers as a part of that course. Similarly, advanced student programmes or home-room situations may also offer educational options that may be outside the speciality of the supervising teacher. To make an actual choice of options fully available to students, schools need to shift these examples of personalised learning from the fringes of their business to the central core.

Guidance and Tutors.

For the purpose of discussion the need for student guidance and the provision of tutor groups have been linked together as they seem to fall under a sub-set of personalisation in terms of support to individual students. Guidance seemed to be specifically targeted at providing relevant information to students to help make career decisions, perhaps reinforcing the views of David Hood (1998) and Mark Harrison (2004) that schools are seen as vehicles to help students to get qualifications for their future employment. Guidance provided in this area, without any differing school structures, seems unlikely to assist with personalising learning for students in the classroom. Similarly, tutor groups, regardless of whether horizontally or vertically aligned, or as providing a point of contact for parents, seem unlikely to provide any assistance for personalised learning without specific changes in secondary teaching practice and student understandings. In essence, without corresponding changes in school structures and understandings, guidance seems doomed to exist simply as an explanation of what options are available for senior students to take, with tutor groups likely to remain an administrative exercise in entering attendances and reading notices.

However, an exception to this may be the 'river groups' set up in one of the researched schools. This seems a direct attempt to transform existing practices and understandings about the role that schools may need to be providing students to personalise education. In particular, the focus on

monitoring the learning progress of an individual student appears as a direct combination of all three threads of personalised learning.

Monitoring of individual learning seems likely to require an increased involvement with parents, discussions around the meta-cognitive abilities of the students and, of course, is centric to individual students. However for this tutor guidance to occur effectively, as implemented by the researched school, the numbers of tutors need to be significantly increased. Increasing the number of tutors in a school may serve two important purposes: Firstly, the level of personal interaction between the tutor and individual students is likely to be higher when the student numbers are lower. Secondly, the more school staff involved in this role then the more likely it seems that this form of tutor support will assist with an overall shift, from teachers, students and caregivers, towards the underpinning principles of personalised learning.

To extend this concept further, it seems logical to devolve career guidance to the students' personal tutor. Additionally, in line with the underpinning principle of partnerships, it seems the role of developing the home/school partnership may also be best approached, particularly as an initial step towards personalised education, from the smaller tutor grouping. Such a move may assist with all teachers in coming to terms with the potential changing role of teachers, particularly in a professional role of helping parental and student understandings of the changing nature of 21st century education.

Home Rooms:

The concept of home rooms where students have a consistent teacher across subjects, at face value, did seem to provide relatively clear examples of personalising learning for students. The intent seemed clear that a pedagogical approach that revolved around personalising learning for the specific individuals was being attempted or enacted in those classes. This certainly seems to fall within the construct of being student centric. In addition, those students involved with inquiry learning or gifted provisions seemed to be receiving education directed at improving their meta-cognitive understandings, particularly in terms of becoming more self directed in their learning. There may be some question as to whether or not an actual attempt at a form of partnership with the home is being established or not as a result of the home room environment. It appears that these home-room classes appear to be the 'fringe dwellers' or 'chosen few' of the total school population. As a result, it seems likely that the home/school relationship may be more advanced, due to being specially separated, than that of the average student following a more conventional pathway through the school.

It is the way the concept of personalising learning is being adopted for a select few that perhaps raises questions about the structures of schools as an organisation. If, as suggested, personalising learning is a key to better education and may bring about much needed transformational changes to our education system, how will we provide personalised educational structures to the average student following conventional pathways?

As one of these principals stated, the prospect of sixty homerooms was not a reality in their school due to being 'hamstrung' by traditional structures along with manageability issues around classroom availability, staffing and employment conditions.

However, a possible reality for implementing personalised education may be the concept of schools within schools (Sergiovanni, 2001). In some respects this format may already exist in the form of House groups within schools, which although usually focused on extracurricular activities, could provide a basis for personalised academic provisions. Whilst house groupings were discussed during this research as a potential means of helping develop relationships and community spirit amongst staff and students, it was not discussed as a potential medium to provide personalised learning. However one specific comment from Kerry has given rise to this area of thought;

I think we are using the houses for a lot more than what they have been used for in my other schools. It used to be just sport, or tended to be mostly sport. Here, we are using it for all sorts of things and trying to develop the breadth for what we can use them for (Kerry).

House groups could be developed further by utilising the underpinning principles of personalised learning and the pedagogical practice of homeroom teachers to develop an environment that encompasses the best of both worlds.

Whilst it seems that secondary schools may have concerns about a lack of subject experts within a home room environment, this may be alleviated by expanding the educational house grouping to include teachers with divergent areas of expertise.

If the homeroom environment is proving successful by using the underpinning principles of personalised learning, then it seems that considering how the house systems may develop into 'schools within school' may be useful territory for educational leaders to explore. A multiple house system based around educational provisions may be large enough for the variety of subject expertise, yet still small enough to care. With advances in computers and other educational technologies, it seems feasible that access and use of such mediums may have a role to play in putting the principles of personalisation into practice.

Access to Technology:

In shifting from chisels and stone tablets to pen and paper I wonder if the people of the time shrugged their shoulders and said, 'it's just a tool, you know. There's nothing wrong with going back to the chisel if the ink runs out.' Whilst this is a little tongue in cheek, the reality seems to be that computer technology is indeed becoming an integrated part of modern life and is creating the redundancy of many existing practices. Yet large organisations are often reluctant to change procedures and structures despite technological advancements. As an anecdotal example of this, the British Royal Artillery, until a few years ago, always had a soldier standing to attention thirty feet directly behind any guns firing. The purpose was seemingly unclear, until it was discovered that the traditional role was actually to hold the horses whilst the guns were fired (Langdon, personal communication, 2009).

The question for school leaders is what elements of school procedures should be made redundant through or as a result of technological change? It may be that schools are still maintaining procedures, like the royal artillery example, which may not serve any real purpose for modern education (Hood, 1998). Is computer technology being utilised to simply maintain existing practices in a more efficient manner, such as attendances and replacing overhead projectors, or are schools as an organisation asking questions of how the technology itself can actually improve the educational outcomes for individual students.

The possibilities to personalise education and learning through computer technology may be limited only by our imaginations. To re-imagine schooling, as suggested by Caldwell (2006), we may also need to imagine the possibilities that technology can create. Stuart Crainer (1996), in discussing the impact of technology of organisational structures, suggests that technology will have no lasting or transformational effect until we learn to ask how the technology can alter what we do. This may be the key with regard to technology and personalised learning. As Ashley suggested, technology may not yet be utilised to its potential in education. The potential of technology in education may depend on the questions that we ask of it. In asking these questions, educators may need to shift their thinking of technology from being a tool that they can use to expedite existing practices, whereby the same mistakes can be made at twice the speed, to one where technology is seen as a prime resource requiring new approaches to pedagogy and educational structures.

These new approaches, as a distinct part of personalising education, will require specific leadership skills to aid the transition in education. The next section explores such leadership, in particular how transformational change may be lead in a secondary school environment.

5.4 - Leading the way:

The principals in this study were all clear about three main areas that are critical to leading effective change. This section explores the findings in terms of leaders creating a collective vision, having rigorous research foundations to decisions and the need for educational leaders to have time and patience in implementing change.

Collective Vision:

There is an old business truism which declares that motivation does not bubble up from the bottom, it percolates down from above. In this regard, it seems that any vision whether collective or not, must be believed and promulgated by the leader. This may be the baseline as to whether transformational changes will occur in existing school structures to allow personalised learning to flourish; if a school leader *believes* personalisation is the way forward, it seems more likely for this belief system to become an accepted or shared vision amongst educational stakeholders. However a danger may exist for school leaders in either failing to communicate the vision consistently, or to generalise the vision to the extent it becomes meaningless (Bush, 2003). In either account, it seems reasonable that a successful vision should be communicated through many channels and be a clear and heartfelt message (Kotter & Cohen, 2002)

Whilst the need for this personal belief and continual articulation of vision was suggested by the principals in this research, it seems that gaining the

'buy in' or approval from all staff was seen as more problematic. As such, the need for leadership from within staff may indeed be a critical element in developing collective vision. However, in crafting a collective vision, it may require a particular element of leadership which was not discussed by these principals but seems to be a consistent factor in successful transformational leadership in the business sector. This critical factor seemed to revolve around the leader surrounding themselves with people, in vital or strategic positions, who are aligned with the same vision as the leader (Harris et al, 2000, Kotter, 1990, 1996, Kotter & Cohen, 2002, MacBeath & MacDonald, 2000). This may raise the issue, for existing school organisations, of leaders needing the skills to bring staff into alignment, or the resolve to remove or marginalise those within the organisation that may stifle or deliberately sabotage the desired transformational direction. Challenging poor or wayward performance may be a distinct characteristic of a successful transformational leader (Davis, 2007). In educational environments which tend to uphold the values of democracy, diversity and egalitarianism (Keamy et al, 2006), this may be a difficult path for many school leaders to tread.

To develop a collective and transformational vision for personalised education, there appears to be five components that school leaders may need to demonstrate;

1. They must believe in their vision and consistently articulate it.
2. Their actions must be congruent with their vision.

3. Clearly identify themselves and the vision as an agent of change.
4. Strategically surround themselves with people who support the vision.
5. They must have the courage to stand firm on their direction.

These elements are supported by literature which also expresses the need for creating long term sustainable change versus short term results (Day et al, 2000, Devanna and Tichy, 1990, Hargreaves, A. 2007, 1990, Kotter, 1996, Kotter &Cohen, 2002, Southworth, 2008). However, short term results may also be critical to sustained change and developing a shared vision amongst educators in a school environment (Davis, 2007, Kotter 1996). Leadership for personalised learning may need *planned* successes along the route to sustained transformation through a collective vision. In this regard, the successes from school specific changes such as 'river groups', home rooms or other such steps towards personalised education should be planned and heralded, as opposed to being marginalised as solutions for students on the fringes of traditional provisions. To develop a collective vision for personalisation, leaders should be aware of the power of these small contextual changes to influence the overall disposition of people (Fullan, 2003).

Rigorous Research Foundation:

There seems little doubt that employing a rigorous research base prior to any shift in educational provision is a sensible and defensible aim. Whilst a transformational shift in education may need an acceptance or desire for change from all stakeholders (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, Fullan, 2008, Giancola & Hutchison, 2005, West, 2000), it appears logical that developing the understandings and belief systems of educators themselves, through intellectual endeavour, may be an essential requirement for successful change leadership (Bass, 1990).

However, if any shift is to be built upon a research foundation, particularly in terms of best evidence thinking, the time commitment from educators may be a prime consideration for school leaders. Whilst this was alluded to during the research with these principals, no specific solution to enable this time commitment seemed to be made apparent. It is in this regard that leaders may need to be careful to ensure that a shift towards developing research based educators (Caldwell, 2006) does not become another exercise in 'innovatitus' whereby the demand for reflection and research about classroom practice, such as after-school professional learning groups, is added to other expectations and demands of teachers. A continual tacking on of new innovations, methods and curricular changes may lead to disillusionment which is unlikely to lead to a collectively shared vision and transformational change (Davis, 2007, Fullan, 2008, Hargreaves & Fink, 2007).

A warning of the dangers of additional workload is not to discredit or negate the importance of having a rigorous and continual research foundation to teaching practice. With the concept of personalising learning at an embryonic stage (Keamy et al, 2006), a rigorous research base may be critical for successful implementation. However, a question that school leaders may need to ask is which elements of current school expectations or structures can be given up or altered to allow this research foundation to develop? In this regard, approaching technology as a prime resource for education and asking how it may assist with both developing the research base of teachers as well as altering or removing some time consuming educational practices may be an important element of developing a rigorous research base within schools.

Time and Patience:

Whilst the researched principals all expressed the need for ensuring that any educational change is implemented in a timely and sustained fashion, there appears to be a missing component in terms of creating any transformational change to secondary schooling through personalised educational provisions. Whilst there seems little doubt that ensuring the school as a community can shift together is a commendable course of action, the research evidence gathered in this project seemed asynchronous with many case studies of successful change leaders who had made dramatic and succinct changes to their core business approach from the outset (Kotter, 1996, Kotter & Cohen, 2002, Collins, 2002).

A slow and incremental approach may only be successful if personalised learning happened to be congruent with existing school organisation and provisions. However, this research seems to indicate that this not the case and that secondary schools do face a significant and transformational shift if personalised learning is to be a reality for every student. If this is the case, to paraphrase Jim Collins (2002), it seems that the flywheel of education may need to be abruptly redirected first, to then begin the process of transformational change towards personalised education.

This initial redirection may be critical to any transformational change in education. Whilst time and patience may be an important element of transformational shifts, it also needs a consistency of action, aligned to the overall transformational direction, over a sustained period of time to cement the desired changes. As Kotter and Cohen point out; "A great deal of work can be blown away by the winds of tradition in a remarkably short period of time" (2002, p 6.). This suggests that actions made only to fringe elements of educational provision, rather than the core business, may be unlikely to create any sustained transformational shift in education.

Education appears to be a dynamic industry in terms of being an ever changing entity. As the rate of change accelerates in our society perhaps there is no time like the present to initiate change. Whilst patience may still be a virtue in successful transformational leadership, successful leaders for change are seemingly relentless in both communicating the message and their urgency for action (Kotter and Cohen, 2002).

Time and patience are essential components to change. However, it seems unlikely to be significant and sustained unless the leader is relentless in their *pressure* for such a change in their core organisational culture. After all, every diamond needs both time and pressure for its creation; if there is no pressure to transform, even diamonds will remain as coal.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION:

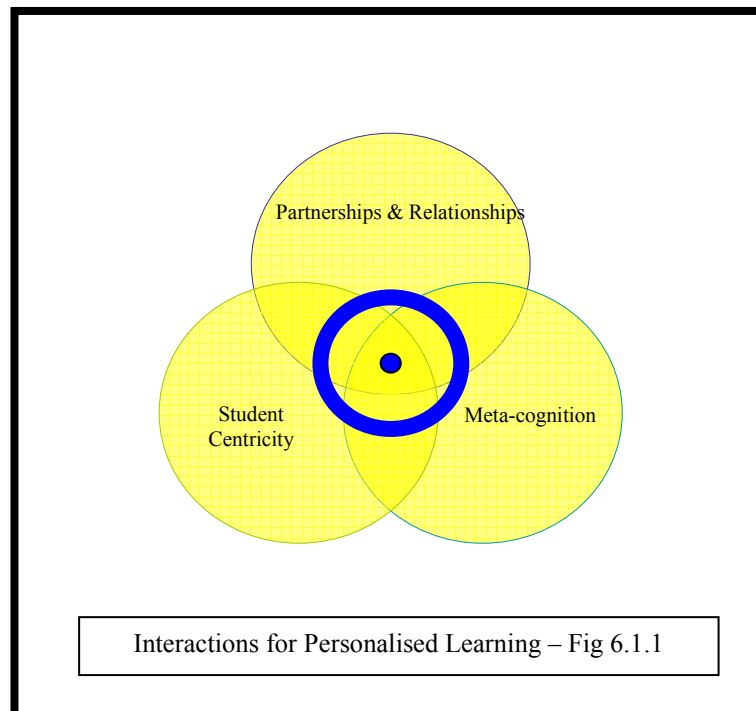
Much that passes for education is not education at all but ritual (David Gardner).

This research explored the underpinning principles of personalising learning, how these are understood by secondary school principals in New Zealand and what effects this may have on their school environment and leadership in the future. As a small scale qualitative research project, this research is not in a position to make summative statements about best practice of personalised learning or transformational leadership; however it is able to provide a means of developing the conversation about implementing personalised learning.

This chapter develops this conversation in three sections. Firstly, Personalising learning in New Zealand discusses how the three underpinning principles of are interdependent in nature and what may be required to create a personalised educational environment. The second section, titled Personalising the Core, suggests how tutor and house groups could be better utilised by schools to help create a personalised environment for all students rather than just for the 'fringe dwellers'. The final section, titled Taking up the challenge, places the responsibility for personalising education with school leaders.

6.1 - Personalised Learning in New Zealand:

The underpinning principles of what may constitute personalised learning seem to be able to be expressed clearly within the context of this research. Whilst some literature may express personalised education as essentially placing the student at the centre of all provisions (Hopkins, 2007), this research suggests that student centricity must also be coupled with the concepts of partnership along with increased meta-cognitive ability of students. This creates a need to focus on the whole, rather than any one principle in isolation, to create an effective personalised learning environment . The following diagram seeks to express the necessary interdependency between all three underpinning principles that is required for personalised learning to take place:



The prior diagram indicates that the essential target for personalised learning is the cumulative effect of all three underpinning principles. Similar to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, as expressed by Bishop and Glynn (1999), all three need to be actively worked towards if the full spirit of the concept is to be realised. A focus on any one principle in isolation may have limited positive effects, but only in that specific area which may have little effect on the concept of personalising learning as a whole.

In practical terms for New Zealand secondary schools, the revised curriculum clearly suggests a focus towards personalisation as a direction for schools to be heading in. The underpinning values of the curriculum are clear that partnerships and relationships need to become more of a focus for school leaders, particularly in regard to all decision making. Additionally, the key competencies appear as a potential guide for directing teachers towards developing the meta-cognitive abilities of students.

However, in implementation it appears that the current secondary school structures, as experienced in New Zealand, may be a barrier for personalising education. This research seems to suggest that whilst some aspects of the researched schools may be student centric, the existing norm is one of being program centric, with the emphasis on transmission of subject content.

As Kelly clearly suggested, making personalised learning a reality for all students with the secondary school is:

a huge challenge within the traditional confines of timetable, structures of school, staffing, facilities. Unfortunately, I think those things can hamstring us, that traditional stuff (Kelly).

This traditional stuff may be creating a situation that not only limits personalisation, but also perpetuates the 'innovatitus' that may afflict schools and teachers alike. Personalisation for students may run the risk of simply being tacked onto the existing education system whilst failing to get to the heart of educational change (Deal, 2007, Hood, 1998).

In making this educational shift, it appears that a clearer vision or statement from the Ministry of Education would assist school leaders in removing any doubt as to whether personalisation of education and a subsequent transformation of structures to facilitate this, is a desired future outcome for New Zealand secondary schools. If the underpinning principles of personalised learning are a desired outcome for New Zealand education, with many government documents suggesting that they are (House of Representatives, 2008, Ministry of Education, 2006, 2007a, 2008, Tolley, 2009), then it seems that this should be urgently discussed with all educational leaders as it appears to indeed be a precursor for a transformational shift in education.

Conversations amongst educational leaders may need to revolve around providing differentiated learning in the secondary classroom, teaching across a range of subjects and developing the meta-cognitive

understandings of students. In terms of future research, the development of a New Zealand model for life-long, self-directed or autonomous learners within a secondary context may be imperative in assisting with teacher training and subsequent implementation of personalised learning.

However, the reality may be that school leaders may simply have to get on with the job of shifting their own school towards personalised learning in the classroom. A shift of this nature will require a high element of 'unlearning' in terms of educators being able to let go of deep seated behaviours and beliefs that may prevent them from moving from the comfort of established routines (Deal, 2007, McWilliams, 2002, Senge, 2006, West, 2000). In this regard it may be that the concept of strategic abandonment of certain school structures may be necessary to facilitate the integration of personalised learning into secondary school structures. As an example, two of the researched principals alluded to their strong pastoral networks of year level deans. In one case, it appears the deans required the reversal of vertically aligned tutors for their benefit. The other principal, whilst highly commending the deans, also saw them as a potential barrier to developing individual teacher responsibility for the pastoral care of students within their classroom. In this second example, by having an effective deans system, this principal felt that teachers may be less likely to accept responsibility for student behaviour when they can pass it on to someone else. In either example the purpose is not to criticise individual circumstance, but simply to suggest that the time to fix a roof is when the sun is shining. The strategic abandonment of certain organisational structures, *despite being effective*,

may create the pressure required to shift educators in a direction that is more aligned with an overall vision incorporating personalised learning.

If we are seeking a transformational change in our schools, it will require support from both the public and educators alike. Whilst personalised education can alter peripheral practices, if we actually seek significant change to the traditional rituals and structures of the school then we must seek to personalise the core business of our schools. This shift may be likely to face a barrage of criticism and attacks to maintain the status quo (Fullan, 2003). In this respect a more pragmatic approach, in terms of forestalling proponents of the status quo, may be to suggest a revival of small school thinking, based upon these principles of personalised learning, rather than a wholesale transformational change of education (Deal, 2007). Small school thinking within existing secondary organisations could be achieved through expanding the use of both tutor and house systems in an effort to align the core business of schools with the underpinning principles of personalised learning.

6.2 - Personalising the Core:

To gain the support of both parents and educators alike, it seems important to build upon or accentuate existing systems to begin the process of any transformational change. In New Zealand, it appears that the concepts of Tutor and House groups are accepted and understood structures which could be developed in a specific manner to create and promote 'small school thinking' and help personalise education for our students.

Tutors or Form classes:

Elevating the status and use of tutors is the first major step that secondary schools could take. Whilst it is not all that schools need to do, this form of pastoral and academic care is a critical step that must be taken if we want personalised learning to become a reality for our young people.

Whilst almost all schools can say that they have some form of tutor or form class that students belong to, anecdotally it appears that very few teachers or students view them as anything more than an administrative requirement. In a personalised environment, schools may need to base their provisions with the tutor grouping held at the apex, rather than as an administrative role to be fostered out to less senior staff. The importance of this pastoral role may be the key to creating effective partnerships between the school as an organisation and the student and their home. A shift from administrative tutors to learning tutors requires some important changes:

1. Reduce the numbers of students in tutors by requiring all teachers to undertake this role and dramatically increase the time available. In this research, one school had reduced the tutor numbers by utilising all staff, including support staff. However the demand for increased meta-cognitive learning as a specific component of personalised learning suggests that professional teacher expertise will be required by the tutor teachers.

2. Include a form of educational philosophy, critical thinking or other such meta-cognitive developmental learning as an integral part of the tutor. The autonomous learner model or similar may be a useful start point for teachers. By including an educational purpose, the tutor is elevated from an administrative exercise to an important subject topic as an actual learning environment with the tutor teacher. This also validates the increase in time allotment over traditional subject areas.

3. Remove all other pastoral systems such as deans, academic or career advisors or other such provisions whereby teachers are expected to spread themselves over large numbers of students. This strategic abandonment creates an environment so that when problems or queries occur, teachers, students and parents will need to utilise the pastoral tutor system.

4. Importantly, put in place systems that attempts to place students in tutors whereby an effective relationship is most likely to occur. Ideally this could be parent and student initiated, although a subjective professional decision at a school level may still improve the likelihood of such educational relationships occurring.

If we want to personalise education within secondary schools, we must place utmost importance on the development of a long term relationship between a teacher, student and their family. The clearest and simplest place to start is with a tutor group based on all three underpinning principles of personalised learning. Such an approach to tutor groupings can be an immediate action for secondary schools with minimal cost, minimal disruption yet with the likelihood of high positive results in terms of developing a personalised educational environment.

Academic Houses: Small School Thinking.

Whilst this is a more radical step than that of the tutor groups, an eventual extension from the tutor groups to being part of an academic house, in which most educational provisions are provided, is not unrealistic.

Extending the concept of a tutor group that is based on sound educational relationships leads us to consider how important it is to have consistent educators in a students' life. It is perhaps this basic premise that causes some parents and teachers to clamour for smaller class sizes. However, class size does not wholly determine educational outcomes for an individual student (Hattie, 2009). Class size may be a causal effect towards this, as obviously with fewer students the easier it may be to try and develop an educational relationship; however it is this relationship that is paramount. Therefore a key to personalised learning must be a consistency of teachers whom a student has developed a relationship or partnership with.

Personalised learning for all students could be achieved by secondary schools using a small school thinking approach which places cohorts of students with a consistent group of teachers throughout their schooling. Using the existing house group system in New Zealand may be a possible avenue to create what would be a transformation shift towards personalised learning. Whilst this may be a major shift for many secondary schools, it is not an impossible dream or unrealistic target.

A cohort of 125 to 150 students, evenly spread from year 9 to 13, provides an example whereby this concept could be used to personalise learning.

This academic 'house group' would possibly create five class sizes of 25 to 30 students with six teachers to develop educational provisions. To make it work though, the following points would need to be considered:

1. If the tutors are personality matched as best possible to students, it makes sense to then match the teachers of the house groups. That is, students are in tutors whereby an educational relationship is most likely to occur, *which in turn*, is matched to being part of an overall house group. This attempts two strategies; firstly to enhance teacher collaboration by holding responsibility with likeminded professionals and secondly, to improve the likelihood of effective relationships between student and teacher occurring outside their tutor grouping.
2. The teachers in a house group will need to hold a diversity of academic strengths to cover the range of curriculum areas that students will require. This may require the strategic abandonment of faculties as we currently know them in secondary schools. The current division of subjects polarises staff, is a discouragement to collaboration and worst of all, has little resemblance to how knowledge is used in the real world (Littky and Grabelle, 2005).
3. Timetable structures must be collapsed and simplified as much as possible to create a consistency of teachers for the students. With only six teachers in a house group this should not be too difficult,

especially given that a tutor teacher will also be a specialist in an area that students are likely to study.

4. Administrative components, such as timetable, may need to be devolved to the house group. Whilst overall governance and executive decisions rests with the principal and board of trustees, the day to day implementation of education should be left with those professionals who know the students and parents' best.

Whilst all these suggestions are not exhaustive in explaining all the potential pitfalls and advantages, they do provide a start point for both conversation and immediate action. The use of personalised tutor groups or academic house systems should be considered as rudimentary ideas to get to work on personalising learning. Schools are situational in nature with diverse people and expectations. There can simply be no generic checklist for creating personalised education or transformational changes in education (Fullan, 2003). It seems reasonable though, if implemented and promoted, personalised learning may rapidly develop and transform the way we educate our children.

6.3 - Taking up the Challenge:

Personalised learning in secondary schools will remain a sporadically implemented 'buzz word' unless educational leaders undertake to align the core functions of their schools with the underpinning principles outlined by this research. It is not enough to focus on the educational fringes in the hope that this may somehow filter through by osmosis or some other gravitational force. The flywheel of education, if personalised learning is to be a reality, requires an abrupt redirection to begin the process. This is a transformational challenge and the leaders courageous enough to put their students first will likely face a barrage of criticism from many quarters (Fullan, 2003).

Despite the likelihood of opponents to such changes to the core of schools, long term partnerships for learning will not exist unless we put in place structures that allow teachers to educate and be involved with students and their family consistently over a long term. Meta-cognitive understandings will not improve to the level of informed decision making unless we specifically educate students in this area. Who better to assist with this than the professional teacher who is developing a long term partnership with a student and their family? Finally, a transformational shift from being program to student centred will only occur once our structures place a priority on partnerships and relationships above subject content and qualification demands.

Qualifications may be necessary benchmarks for secondary students however schools must ensure that assessments serve a higher educational purpose rather than dominating school systems (Sergiovanni, 2001).

By creating purposeful tutor groupings and by developing smaller artificial schools within larger secondary organisations with a range of consistent educators, will enable teachers to cope with the demand of knowing students and caregivers well enough to develop effective professional relationships. As Littky & Grabelle, suggest;

The hardest working teachers with the best of intentions could never fully respond to the individual requests, questions and demands of the more than 150 kids they work with every day. The traditional school structure works against parents and teacher collaborating, and even causes antagonism between the two (2004, p.144).

Allowing educators to work in an organisation where there is a consistency of students in front of them, in total numbers that can be managed in terms of partnerships, will enable teachers to get on with the business of personalising learning. That business is about igniting a passion for learning in every student.

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Appendix I.

Introductory Email:

Subject Title: Personalised Research Project – Introduction

Dear <Name>,

Thank you for your interest in my research regarding personalised education in New Zealand. Whilst this essentially is for my own benefit in completing a Masters degree, I would hope that our conversations may also prove useful to yourself and your school.

Much of our ministry documentation at present refers to Personalised Learning. The ministry published a booklet specifically on the subject whilst the Secondary Futures project draws heavily on concepts directly related to personalisation. Additionally, the 'Ka Hikitia; managing for success' Maori education strategy explicitly states that personalised learning is critical for future educational success.

It seems to me that if the rhetoric surrounding Personalised Learning is becoming a common currency, we should also be looking towards how or if this can actually become a practical and useful approach to improve student outcomes.

My research seeks to explore principals' viewpoints with regard to "a more personalised system". Namely, your concept of what Personalising Learning involves, how this is currently enacted in your school and perhaps, most importantly, how you might manage the 'transformational changes' that may be required to implement personalised learning in the future.

I hope you do see this as an opportunity to express your considered views on the current and future educational landscape of New Zealand. This in turn may assist with encouraging further research in this area or, at best, assist other educators with implementing personalised education.

Kind Regards

Pat Hargreaves

Participant Information Sheet

Dear <Principal>,

This letter is to inform you about my research which is being conducted as a partial requirement for a Masters of Educational Leadership. This research is to investigate how a selection of secondary school principals conceptualise personalised learning, how and to what degree they feel they are currently providing it within their schools and how they intend to manage any changes in the future with regard to personalised education.

I would like to interview you on three separate occasions. This is to try and break the process into distinct and more manageable amounts. Each interview should take no longer than 45 minutes, depending on dates and times suitable to you. With your permission, these interviews will be recorded which I will then transcribe into a document. These will not be used for any analysis or other purpose until you have read and approved them.

The information collected will be used to write my thesis to complete a Masters Degree. This will be widely accessible through the Australian Digital Thesis (ADT) database. However, it is also possible that articles, presentations or other literature may be an outcome of this research in the future. Only my supervisor and I will be privy to the notes, documents, recordings and the paper written. Afterwards, any notes or documents will be destroyed and recordings erased. The Waikato School of Education and I will each keep a copy of the approved transcriptions of the interviews but will treat them with the strictest confidentiality and in secure electronic storage as best able.

You will not be named in the publications and every effort will be made to disguise identity (let me know if there's a special pseudonym you would like). However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as general school information, such as a description and particular activities, are likely to be included in the report which means inferences could be made as to a participants' identity.

If you choose to take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular interview question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced on the 20th August. This data, in the form of interview transcripts, requires your express approval before I will use it.
- Ask any further questions about the study that occurs to you during your participation.
- Be given access to a summary of findings from the study when it is concluded.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor.

Thank you for your time so far and I do hope that we can enjoy a discussion about the concepts of personalising learning and the implications of this for New Zealand schools.

Kind Regards

Consent Form

I have read the **Participant Information Sheet** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. Any questions I had about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I can withdraw any information I have provided up until I have approved the interview transcript. No analysis will be made until this approval is given.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study up until 20th August 2009, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study.

I accept that all measures to ensure my privacy and confidentiality will be undertaken and I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix II.

Research Interview One:

Principals Concepts.

This interview seeks to explore the basic understandings and opinions with regard to Personalised Learning as a concept.

As a principal, lots of documents pass through your hands – How often would you come across Personalised Learning as a term?
In what contexts does it seem to be used?

Where do your ideas for Personalised Learning stem from?

Ministerial descriptions for personalised learning suggest that “the system must fit the learner rather than the learner fit the system”.
How would this be a reality in your opinion?

Much literature about Personalised Learning seems to hinge around the concept of ‘choice’. What choices about education do you think students and parents should be able to make?

Irrespective of Personalised Learning – what is, or do you want to be, the key elements of your school right now?

If you were able to sum up Personalised Learning in just a few key words, what would you say that it's all about?

Research Interview Two.**School Structures.**

This interview seeks to find out what is currently happening within the principals schools that may fall within the personalised learning construct.

Could you give me examples or stories of provisions that personalises education for your students? What was the trigger for these developments?

How does your school currently use technologies to improve student outcomes? What impact has ICT had on the ability of your school to personalise education?

How does your school seek to “set students up to be life long learners” i.e. able to learn autonomously? What do these students “look like”?

What are some examples of choices that your students and caregivers are able to make with regard to their educational provisions? Why are they given this choice?

What are some examples of choices that they clearly are not allowed to make? What are the main reasons behind this?

How does your school consult with students and caregivers with regard to education provisions?

In general, how involved are caregivers with the day to day education of their children in your school?

Across the board, how well do you feel that your school is providing personalised learning to your students at present? What enables or prevents this from happening?

Research Interview Three

Future Secondary Schooling.

Based on the Principals knowledge and experience, how does she/he envisage the future of secondary schools if they are to become fully personalised?

The secondary futures project suggests that by 2028, if given a blank canvas, students would be at the centre of that canvas and everything designed around the individual student. Amongst this is suggestions of customised learning for each student, multiple educational providers, students working collaboratively but also independently and that technology will play an even bigger role. Other authors have also suggested that a key component, if not the component of personalised learning, is the issue of student autonomy. This implies that students (along with their caregivers) be given full choice in all aspects of their education.

As a Principal, what are your likely intentions and educational direction over the next five to ten years?

In regard to Personalised Learning, what would you realistically be trying to achieve in the future?

What leadership skills are likely to be required to bring about these 'transformational' changes? Who needs to hold them?

What are the critical factors to successful change in your school?

How would you describe your ideal school for the future?

Appendix III.

Autonomous Learner Model.

Further information available @ <http://www.alpspublishing.com/>

