

Primary Principal's Sabbatical Report

Manurewa Literacy Schooling Improvement Cluster

Are students who have been involved in the cluster work more advantaged in their transition to intermediate school and consequently make more rapid progress and gain higher levels of achievement?

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Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank the NZEI and the Ministry of Education for granting me this sabbatical which has provided me with time for reflection, learning and forward thinking.

I also wish to thank the Weymouth Intermediate School Board of Trustees for their support, as well as our Deputy Principal, Audrey Kippen who so ably took the role as Acting Principal.

My thanks is also extended to those contributing schools who allowed me to visit their schools and conduct interviews.

Purpose:

Weymouth Intermediate School has been part of the Manurewa Literacy Schooling Improvement Cluster during 2009, 2010 and 2011. One of our contributing schools is also part of this cluster, but there are a number who are not.

The purpose of my sabbatical was to look at whether students involved in the cluster work are more advantaged in their transition to intermediate school and consequently make more rapid progress and achieve higher levels than those students who are not.

At the beginning of 2011, literacy entry data was collected on students from all contributing schools, with the intention of identifying focus students who were working above expectation, at expectation, below expectation, at risk, and critically at risk. Targets were set for students in each category. I have tracked the progress of the focus students from each group to ascertain whether students from the cluster school made accelerated progress as a result of the professional development teachers were receiving and the change in practice.

Background:

Weymouth Intermediate had been involved in professional development for teachers in the curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy for a number of years through the Manurewa Enhancement Initiative. When this contract concluded at the end of 2009, we were invited to join the Manurewa Literacy Schooling Improvement Cluster. A design team had been formed and Learning Media had been contracted to work with identified schools to provide professional development.

The vision was to support the aspirations of schools to improve valued outcomes for students with a focus on reading.

To get there, the professional learning would support teachers, school leaders, and cluster leaders to strengthen their leadership and classroom practices through an ongoing process of evidence based inquiry with a strong knowledge building focus.

Cluster targets were set based on the analysis of the 2009 student data. Ready to Read colour wheel, STAR and PAT in comprehension and vocabulary were the recognised assessment tools across the cluster.

Literacy pedagogy targets, leadership pedagogy targets, and design team targets were set. In 2010 a cluster strategic and annual plan was developed. Guidelines were developed for each school to use as a basis for developing their literacy annual plan.

Rationale:

The drive for this inquiry was the desire to investigate whether schools who engaged in like professional development had consistency in the teaching of literacy that best met the needs of students and better supported a seamless transition and an enhanced learning environment.

Methodology:

A number of approaches were used to facilitate this inquiry, including:

1. Visiting contributing schools and another intermediate school (which was also involved in the cluster) to gain information on
 - improving standards (raising the bar, closing the gap)
 - development of more effective practices
 - informing improvement measure, through clear review and self evaluation

- issues encountered
 - strategies employed
 - impact
 - measurement of success
 - the role of learners
 - student voice
2. Spending time in classrooms. Interviewing students and teachers.
 3. Collection of literacy data over a period of a year.
 4. Professional discussions with a colleague.
 5. Reading of professional literature.

The intermediate school and one of the primary schools had been involved in the cluster, and one of the contributing schools had not, but had been involved in literacy professional development through a self funded external facilitator.

Findings:

There were parallels between the three schools interviewed and Weymouth Intermediate.

All schools indicated that they had underachievement problems. Schools in the cluster had joined the cluster as they saw the need for a collective responsibility to address the needs of underachievement. It was seen as a vehicle for schooling improvement with a focus on raising the bar.

The schools identified the following challenges in relation to the sustainability of teacher capability in the teaching of literacy:

- The intermediate schools each had only one feeder school involved with the cluster.
- Sustainability. Improved practice gave teachers the facility to gain promotion and move on.
- Sustainable practices. Making sure that everything gained is not lost.
- The need to apprentice lead teachers to develop a broad base of expertise.
- The need for strong induction practices for new teachers.
- A variation in teacher capacity, especially in writing.

Strategies Employed to Effectively Improve Practice:

- Teachers were regularly observed by both lead teachers and outside facilitators. Pre observation chats took place and teachers were aware of the observer's purpose.
- Points for discussion after observations included:
 - explicit teaching of processes and strategies
 - teacher's interactions with children's ideas, including feedback
 - informed and shared learning intentions
 - explicit links to prior knowledge, both world and literacy knowledge
 - catering for diverse learning needs
 - feedback on questions for students after the lesson
 - next steps for the teacher
- A rating of the observation was done under the above first five aspects to identify whether the teacher showed strong evidence of effectiveness, some evidence of effectiveness, or limited evidence of effectiveness.
- Professional learning discussions between teachers were held on a regular basis.
- Leadership team meetings were held, both with and without the external facilitators.
- Most staff meetings were literacy linked.

- Technology and specialist teachers were fully involved in all professional development and were expected to make cross curricular links in their programme delivery.
- Target students were identified from categories of critically at risk, at risk, of concern, at, and above. Targets were set in each of these areas.
- Modelling of effective literacy practice was done by lead teachers and by external facilitators.
- Sharing of effective practice took place and respectful and trusting relationships developed between teachers.
- Teachers needing extra support were identified and further professional development was provided to meet their needs.
- Progress evaluations were conducted twice a year in the cluster schools.

Evidence of Improved Teaching Practice and Student Achievement:

- Lead Teachers now have an in depth knowledge of individual teacher's practice, 'where everyone is and what they need.'
- A clear pathway for professional development has been developed through consultation and guidance from external facilitators. Some schools have also worked in collaboration with other schools in the cluster.
- There is evidence of improved teacher practice from both scheduled observations and professional learning conversations.
- Student voice. Students now direct their literacy because it is needs based. Students are able to articulate their learning pathways through 3 way conferences.
- There has been significant evidence based improvement in student achievement in both reading and writing.
- Teacher surveys indicate movement for most teachers. School systems of coaching and observations to engage teachers in practice analysis conversations in the effectiveness of the strategies they are trialling have been developed.
- A lot of work has been done in developing teacher ability to moderate and make overall teacher judgements.
- Cross curricular links are starting to be made.
- Literacy progressions have been broken down into child speak.
- Planning is very evidence based. Literacy interviews with teachers are held regularly. Teachers are expected to bring data and individual student's progress is discussed. Accountability has increased.
- Teachers are more skilled in data analysis. They are using data to collectively discuss the progressions of all students.
- Schools are evaluating the progression of the focus students toward meeting their identified learning goals and teachers are adjusting their teaching to ensure students are making accelerated progress.
- Teachers are creating classroom learning communities that support the students to develop feelings of personal efficacy through being in more control of their learning.
- Joint responsibility has been taken for student's progress and achievement.
- Leadership has been grown and induction processes have been improved.

Conclusion:

It has been a very difficult task to ascertain whether the students from the contributing school which is involved in the Literacy Cluster are more advantaged in their transition to intermediate school and consequently make more rapid progress as a result of the professional development teachers are receiving and the subsequent change in practice, as there are many variables. The contributing

school in question has a higher decile rating than any of the other schools and their students tend to enter intermediate school with overall data that indicates that they are achieving at higher levels than other students. The majority of these students enter our gifted and talented class and make good levels of accelerated progress.

Comparative data was collected in reading and writing. There was no significant indication that students from any one school had shown greater rates of achievement.

The school which was interviewed and was not part of the cluster had other forms of professional development in literacy and had engaged an external facilitator to support them with their strategic direction. Literacy teachers from Weymouth Intermediate were involved in some parts of their professional development in writing.

The greatest benefits from working in the cluster was the shared responsibility of student achievement and progress. Lead teachers and Principals met on a regular basis to participate in a culture of collegial critique and to use evidence from within their schools to monitor the impact of and support effective teacher practices.

Teachers were provided with the professional development to ensure they were using deliberate acts of teaching in response to student's strengths and needs.

The environment developed to ensure that teachers were participating in a culture of collegial critique within the school and across the cluster.

Students become more actively engaged in their learning, to know what their strengths were, what they needed to learn, how they were going to learn and how to recognise when they had learned.

Schools were focussed on cyclical self review, including improvement and evidence from a variety of sources.

'It is what teachers think, what teachers do, and what teachers are at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get.'

Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullen

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Ministry of Education

Learning Media

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Helen Timperley and Judy Parr

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Graham Nuthall