



Sabbatical Report

Strengthening Student Well Being Across Diversity for Improved Learning

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to have been a recipient of the 2011 ASB APPA Travelling Fellowship Award. The fellowship gave me the opportunity to visit and meet colleagues and educational researchers at an international level. The experience has enabled me to develop a global perspective of changes in society and reflect on research and programmes to support students and families in school communities; especially to be better equipped for strengthening student wellbeing across diversity.

I thank the ASB for their continued partnership with APPA and The Ministry of Education in their support of principals' sabbaticals.

I thank Alan Jermaine, Trust Secretary, for his advice and support in preparation for my sabbatical.

I am grateful to Three Kings School staff. I was able to leave my school in the capable hands of Judith Hudson, deputy principal, who with the hard working and experienced teachers of Three Kings School continued to manage the operations of the school successfully.

I thank The Three Kings School Board of Trustees for their support and encouragement to take the Fellowship Award for research, reflection and refreshment.

The benefits of the study have been very rewarding at a personal and professional level.

The Study:

The key objective for my sabbatical was to gain knowledge and skills to enable me to provide future focus for a consolidated approach to Three Kings School's programmes and systems; with the purpose of improving student wellbeing and emotional resilience, to equip them for the challenges of our rapidly changing (global) society.

I spent time researching specific programmes and school partnerships that promote mental, emotional and social literacy; and reading a variety of writings and research on responding to our changing society, developing student values and competencies that strengthen resilience and capabilities.

I had the opportunity to travel to Canada and England to visit schools and principals. These included meeting Patrick Ross, recently retired associate president from Nainomo University, Vancouver Island, Vancouver. Patrick Ross has over 37 years experience working in education, which also included the ministry of education for British Columbia. He took me on a tour of schools in the Nainomo Education District and described the issues and challenges of school communities across a wide sector of society.

I met with the (2011) president of the British Columbia Principals' Association and engaged in excellent conversations on educational issues for schools and presidents. The main outcome being that challenges faced by principals in New Zealand Schools in relation to staffing, student well being, curriculum programmes and government initiatives are common, and that a strong Principals Federation is one that actively supports and represents principals in schools, with the increasing complexities of the 21st century.

We discussed a recent sports initiative in the Nainomo province of Vancouver Island, that has been established to engage, motivate and develop resilience in young students of difficult or poor circumstances. A sports academy (funded by local businesses), provides funds to pay for the sports fees, coaching and uniforms of selected students. The funding is dependent on the agreement by the student and his/her family that the student will attend school regularly, complete school requirements such as projects and homework and turn up for training on time. If the contract is breached the support is withdrawn.

The impact of this has been significant, as it involves the commitment and resolve of the student at all levels, academically, socially, and physically requiring responsibility to be taken by the student. The parent(s) is also required to show support of their child by attending the sport's events and ensuring the student is sent to school.

The initiative has proven itself as 'success breeds success' particularly as it does emphasis student and parent ownership and responsibility.

Another area of focus and discussion was The Roots of Empathy Programme. This was first established in Toronto, Canada and is now widespread across Canadian provinces. It's proven benefits in developing empathy, increased understandings in the care and nurturing of babies that can be translated into empathy and general notions of care and treatment of others, is part of the Canadian school curriculum.

Three Kings School began the programme in 2007 as part of a trial in New Zealand Schools. The programme has operated in the year 5 and 6 level. Each year we see the benefits, wonderment of students in

seeing the growth and development of new born baby as he/she grows and develops over the course of a year. The conversations, observations and interactions of the baby and mother are powerful lessons for students at this level. Teachers have seen improvements and a greater level of empathy being shown by students to each other as a result of the programme.

In the United Kingdom I attended the EADi Conference in York England. The focus of the conference was on - "Rethinking Development in an Age of Scarcity and Uncertainty – New Values, Voices and Alliances for Increased Resilience".

This conference, established in the 1970s, is the largest development studies conference in Europe. The (2011) conference highlighted current global issues being faced in communities, where traditions and customs of diverse cultures are both strengthening to communities and also factors leading to poverty and lack of educational growth and the ability to sustain their environments successfully.

It gave me another (global) perspective on the importance for all societies to have coping strategies for resilience in the face of the pressures of change, be they political, environmental, or personal.

I had the privilege of visiting excellent schools in central London and South East England. A visit to St. Gabriel's Church of England Primary School in London, was an interesting insight into how schools respond to changes due to multiculturalism, highlighting the common challenges and rewards of changing cultural mixes in school communities.

Catsfield School in South East England, presented a wonderful country school, surrounded by a farming community, but with close proximity to the town and sea. The principles and values we seek to endorse in our New Zealand curriculum are common.

I thoroughly enjoyed these school visits and appreciated the discussions had with the school principals and their staff. The visits emphasised for me the importance of principals and their school communities working together in partnership, in order to grow and develop well rounded, resilient, independent yet socially aware students; who can face the many facets of change and difficulties that are part of our local school communities and global society.

I found that people's hopes, expectations and losses are factors that affect our children's well being regardless of country or creed. Death, divorce, separation, transitioning of schools, houses, redundancy, financial issues, puberty, special needs, failure, blended families, religious customs, natural disasters, peer pressures, friendships, illness, trauma, mental illness, abuse of trust, the death of a pet, a new born baby, are all common issues that face students in schools and their communities.

In New Zealand I attended a training Workshop for The Seasons for Growth programme. This programme was developed in Australia in 1996 by Mary McKillop and sisters with the motto, "Never see a need without doing something about it".

International research recognizes the benefits of the programme.

The programme operates in 90 per cent of Australian Schools.

Dr. John Graham, Southern Cross University Australia recognises

The Seasons for Growth programme as a substantial contribution to the well being of young people in a way that no other programme does.

It is designed to support all grief. To support children and adults, not as a counselling or therapy programme, but as a *process*.

Other similar programmes such as "Storm Birds" have supported Australian families affected by devastating bush fires and New-Zealand Earthquake families. Families in Christchurch and The Pike River mining disaster families have been through the programme.

Guidelines for The Seasons for Growth programme include confidentiality. The programme seeks to support emotional well being where a connectedness is established through bonding and coping skills, and resilience developed which enable the ability to 'bounce back'.

The principles of this programme are developed around The Kubler – Ross Grief Model, where people take responsibility for what they are going through and learn to; accept the reality of loss, experience the pain of grief, adjust to the new environment where the person or thing is no longer present, reinvest, move forward, get the emotional energy back, thus learning to live in a new way.

The world health organization defines mental health as a state of well being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and able to make a contribution to their own community.

Summary

The sabbatical enabled me to consider; how schools can support students well being, which in turn affects student's ability to learn. How intervention programmes and systems can be integrated into the school curriculum. How partnerships and networks with the community and outside agencies can be strengthened.

I have been able to lead and assist in the further development of programmes within the school, with a focus on school wide coordinated and cohesive programmes that support student well being, improve resilience and therefore learning.

As a result of my sabbatical and ongoing self-review with managers and teachers of school programmes and initiatives the school has;

strengthened existing programmes and partnerships for better learning with parents, whanau, agencies and contributing schools.

The school continues to develop an effective, co-ordinated and consistent approach to improve student wellbeing, resiliency and emotional/social literacy.

The Roots of Empathy programme continues where teachers are now being trained to implement the programme, rather than having an outside facilitator. The partnership with Pasifika families, Maori whanau and families from all cultures has grown stronger.

The Seasons for Growth programme has been used to support students experiencing grief and trauma. This programme has been very effective, as the school is a safe place for the students to participate in the programme. Families have expressed their gratitude for the effectiveness of the programme.

The Kapa haka and Multicultural Groups are a valued aspect of the school and regularly perform for the surrounding community.

Leadership roles for Maori and Pasifika students is encouraged to strengthen leadership skills and well being.

All students are encouraged to participate in sports, and the arts for all round competencies and successes. Sports and The Arts are celebrated along with other academic achievements.

“In a truly civil society every man, woman and child feels a sense of belonging” Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy Founder /President

Readings

Seasons for Growth Programme

www.credo.org.nz/seasons

www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/programs/seasons-growth

www.sids.org.nz/site/content/newsShow/82

Roots of Empathy Programme

www.rootsofempathy.or/en/where-we-are/new-zealand

www.barnardos.org.nz/child-and

“Changing the World, Classroom by Classroom” M. Gordon.

“Early Resilience and Its Developmental Consequences” Arnold Sameroff, PhD. University of Michigan, USA. Published online December 9, 2005.

“Effects of the Roots of Empathy Programme on Children’s Emotional and Social Competence.” K.A. Schonert-Reich, V. Smith, V & A. Zaidman-Zait.

“Raising Resilient Children: A Curriculum to Foster Strength, Hope and Optimism in Children”. Drs R. Brook & Goldstein.

“Resilience at an Early Age and Its Impact on Child Psychosocial Development”. Suniya Luthar, PhD. Columbia University, USA. Published online November 30, 2005

“What’s the Point of School? Rediscovering the Heart of Education”. Guy Claxton, 2009.

