

Principal Sabbatical Report 2013

Author

Yvonne Blair

School

Kumara School, Greymouth

Sabbatical Time Frame

Term 2, 2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Kumara Board of Trustees, the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for providing me with the opportunity to converse and learn from other like-minded colleagues and schools.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to the busy principals who gave up their own time to share their experiences/ practices in schools with me. I truly appreciated the time given and the professional discussions held with the principals and staff.

Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical was to complete a sustained period of time in my principal's career pathway to engage in a balance of professional learning, reflection and rejuvenation that would benefit the school, my- self and the wider professional learning community.

Background and Rationale

In 2012 Kumara School became a 1.4 sole charge school for the first time. This has presented many challenges and has required a strong commitment from the board, principal, parents and community. The board and I are very keen to keep our school a successful vibrant school.

The challenges we face include:

- ❖ successfully improving learning and teaching through highly effective teaching strategies across a wide range of ages and levels of children in one class
- ❖ Managing reduced resourcing – staffing and Ops Grant
- ❖ Maintaining community involvement and positivism for our school and community.
- ❖ retention of children - a declining roll.

In 2011 we surveyed our school community and it was decided that we would run a junior class and a senior class in the mornings for numeracy and literacy Monday to Wednesday. The junior teacher would teach the junior children on a Thursday morning and supervise the senior children while the principal was on release. On Friday mornings the junior teacher would teach all of the children using her own planning. The principal (myself) would teach everyone in the afternoons.

This brought up several issues with the principal (myself) being the only adult at the school in the afternoon and the children unsettled on a Thursday morning. I was very interested in seeking advice from other principals in similar situations.

Last year I attended the Rural Schools Principals Conference in Palmerston North. I found similar issues being faced by similar sized schools. I also discovered that there are schools and experienced sole charge / small school principals that are successfully managing teaching and learning and who have a lot of valuable information to share. I also noted that Principal burnout and over commitment was high to the point that I believe life balance is being compromised.

Areas of investigation:

Teaching and Learning

- ❖ Specific teaching and learning strategies that are effective in small schools (multi level /multi age– How to target children’s needs working with lower ability and maintaining high expectations of advanced achievers at the same time in the same classroom) Included in this I would like to investigate the role of ICT and inquiry in a multi level environment.

Resourcing

- ❖ Staffing management / resourcing
- ❖ Safety Management – good practices and processes where one teacher is at the school by themselves

Community

- ❖ The role and relationship of the community and school
- ❖ Expectations of the school community (parents, children, teachers, BOT community)

Methodology

1. School Visits

I identified twelve schools through roll size, ERO reports, geography and/or by referrals. I wrote to the principals explaining my sabbatical purpose and rationale. All twelve responded positively.

I arranged the visits geographically starting with the West Coast Schools, then the Canterbury Schools followed by North Island Schools.

2. Reflections

I spaced the visits out so it allowed me time to reflect on each visit in relation to my own practices and school.

3. Related Readings

Findings:

School Management Systems

Etap was the most popular with users very happy with the support available and training. Some of the schools had qualified for Ministry funding for this and I have since also signed up .

I.C.T

Interactive whiteboards are becoming a thing of the past. In fact several schools had taken theirs down and I was offered these at a cheap rate. However if other schools are finding them redundant why would we want them? In their place was the use of data projectors or large screen tv's and apple t.v.'s. Apple T.Vs can be purchased for approximately \$200.

At one school I saw a classroom using the apple TV and ipads effectively in a senior room. The children were using the ipads to create stories. On a screen the teacher was able to flick her computer up and then the children could bring their ipads up on the screen and share their work. This could be critiqued by the other children.

I visited one particular school for two reasons first because it was an elearning school. That is most work is completed using ICT and little paper is used in the senior school. Each child had their own ipad. The school ran a lease arrangement with parents, or children brought their own ipads from home. The children were engaged in learning. The other reason I visited this school was because six years ago it had a roll of six children. It now has a roll of eighty four. It is a country school with a large school twenty minutes away. I asked the principal why this had occurred. She said there were several reasons:

- Farm blocks being subdivided into lifestyle blocks
- The area is close to Auckland and yet cheaper than Auckland
- Local parents began to support their local school
- The children from a marae which had attended the school withdrew its support
- The school ran its own bus run
- The children were attracted by the principal's school philosophy on the use of ICT in the classroom
- The principal's advice was to "Find your uniqueness"

The school now attracts children within the larger schools catchment

Staff Management

All principals agreed that it was necessary to always have a 2nd person on site. One school who used to rely on an emergency phone list now has two people on site at all times due to an issue they had.

All principals thought splitting the juniors and seniors in the morning was a preferable option. However one school still ran with one class and a teacher aide in the class at all times.

Two schools were sponsored by parents or community groups for extra funding. One parental sponsorship was significant.

Another idea ran at one of the schools was clubs in the afternoon. The children chose three clubs for the term. They had to be from three different curriculum areas. On Thursdays they had Kapahaka and on Friday discovery learning. They had three teachers and regular helpers from the community. Club examples were gardening, cooking, robotics, photography, etc. The principal tracked the clubs the children were involved in, and these were assessed. The clubs often interacted with the community.

Community Relationships

Most schools had a preschool on site and felt that this was a definite plus.

Most schools were interacting with the community in activities similar to Kumara School. I did not find too much difference here. One school that was experiencing roll growth was mostly due to a migration of people to the area. I gained a lot by the principal's enthusiasm.

His advice was:

- Make it quite clear that you will not apologise for the fantastic school you have.
- Stop anything that's festering don't prolong it.
- Maintain confidence in the community. Promote "How great are we"
- Reduce administration time
- Teaching is the most important thing to spend money on
- Attract quality teachers – subsidise petrol?
- Find your uniqueness

Implications and Recommendations for Kumara School

- Compared with other U1 schools, Kumara School has an overuse of administration hours and reductions here could possibly allow for resourcing in other areas.
- There was a common opinion that there should always be two adults on site. An emergency phone list is a good idea but does not ensure that there is always a person available to offer support. In an emergency where safety is compromised two adults insure that one can deal with the issue while another maintains learning / behaviour of children/ people not involved.
- As the children seemed unsettled on a Thursday morning perhaps the principal (myself) needed to teach in the senior room to allow a flow of learning for juniors and seniors. However by doing this the principal would lose .1 release and as I had already reduced my management time the Board would have to agree to fund another .1. As Fridays worked well with the release teacher doing her own planning and the children working together on other curriculum areas perhaps this would be a day that could be extended to a full day's release.
- It became apparent that interactive whiteboards were no longer a way forward in ICT. It would be recommended instead to purchase ipads and to investigate further into the use of apple t.v.s at Kumara School.
- On return to school in term four I would also investigate the possibility of gaining funding for the use of etap as our school management system.
- Kumara School is a fantastic country school with keen learners and lots of opportunities for the children to explore, inquire, create and learn. The board, staff and school community need to promote this so that everyone else knows this and we are recognised for "The Great School" that we are.
- It is time for Kumara School to review its vision and "Develop our uniqueness"

- We have just this year started hosting a preschool music group. More work needs to be developed with encouraging our young pre-schoolers into school. Further investigation should be done on the possibility of having a preschool on site.

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