

Principal Sabbatical Report

I was fortunate to be awarded sabbatical leave in 2013 and took term 3 to undertake some research into my topic of “gathering information and /or strategies to support the development of specific programmes that will enhance the skills of our students that enter our new entrant classes”

Background

To understand why I wanted to focus on this area one needs to gain some knowledge of my school and community. Roslyn School is a decile 3, full primary, U5, (approximately 350 students), multicultural school with quite a high transient population. Roughly the breakdown of ethnicity is 53% European, 35% Maori, 5% Pacifica, 7% other (made up of Asian, South American. We also have within this a percentage of refugees and around 10% ESOL students). Our school is in two main ‘parts’ – team teaching from years 1-4 and e-learning (or blended learning) from years 5-8. We also have two digital classrooms at present (year 5/6 and year 7/8). Years 1-4 have computers and at least 8 tablets per class, and the senior classrooms have 1-2 netbooks including BYOs.

The reasoning behind this topic was that many of new entrants that are enrolled at Roslyn come with low literacy, mathematics and social skills. Although there are two kindergartens in the area as well as a Pacifica ‘nest’ we are still getting students who have not had any pre-school experience.

To cater for the needs of our students in the past we have had an effective preschool programme called “Hatchlings” once a week whereby activities are centred on early literacy and social skills. This has been popular with families but on review it wasn’t providing enough for the enrolled students. We needed to relook at what we were doing so that all of our students could be reaching National Standards as soon as possible as well as making the most of all experiences that were offered to them.

As part of this review process, at the beginning of 2013 we focused the Y1-4 classes on team teaching. In our new entrant classes this type of teaching and environment was proving very successful for our students. The new entrant teachers had their ‘home rooms’ but shared the students throughout the day – especially in the high curriculum learning areas. If a teacher was away from the class there was little disruption as students were accustomed to change, knew the routines and were very independent learners. We wanted to extend this learning concept through to the year 2-4 classes. It was slowly introduced starting with maths followed by reading and lastly writing. There were plenty of discussions, problem solving, and soul searching amongst the team but the review at the end of the year shows that students, parents and teachers enjoy the concept. It also showed that the skills of the teachers could be utilised more effectively, reflection and monitoring of certain students were also more effective and a sharing culture had developed amongst the whole team teaching team. In 2014 this will continue and I know will grow even more as the students

who are moving through to years 3-4 will understand team teaching and the transition will continue to be smooth.

Discovery Time was also introduced across the two teams (years 0-2 and years 3-4). This supported language development, experiences for students, writing prompts and positive socialisation.

So, why look at this area if everything was going well?

When examining the data- we have a five week test (report and conference), a six month test (report) the six year net test and of course after one year at school report and conference based on OTJs, found that although there was huge growth from when the students arrived at school until their first anniversary the majority were still behind the required standard. During this time they have had to learn to socialise in a positive manner, in many cases learn a new language, and undertake a huge learning development. This of course impacted as they moved on through the school.

My exploration took on many facets (and of course the goal posts shifted a number of times)- to see if our system could be improved to better meet the needs of our new entrants, to see what other organisations were doing, undertake some reading and personal development and speak to our families and students.

Firstly I reread Elwyn Richardson's "In the Early World". This showed how one person viewed learning outside the square and the most important aspect was the needs of the students, taking them from where they were and using their interests and the environment, reach new learning and discoveries. This programme always maintained the high motivation of the students to want to learn more. Other books were Helen Mays "I am five and I go to School". This book looked at the history and development of the junior area of education and classrooms. Keri Smith's "How to be an explorer of the world" looked at ways students can explore their world and the set out of the book was fantastic. These main ones started to bring my ideas together around a change to the programme that we were presently offering. ERO also had a couple of articles that were of interest - "Including Students with High Needs (July 2013), and "Stories of Resilience and Innovation in Schools and Early Childhood Services (June 2013) - although this one was mainly to do with the Christchurch earthquake and its impact I was interested in some of the similarities to starting a new environment.

I also visited some preschools in Palmerston North. These included both private, Christian and Ministry of Education overseen. Getting their views proved interesting as although they all had common threads there were huge distinctions between them all. This is something schools need to be aware of as many of the children now enrolling at our school come from private establishments and the preparation of children for school is as varied as the facilities. I gave each a survey to complete (appendix 1) and had a follow up meeting for further information with most along with meeting some parents and students.

Of course, many of the students that were (or going to be) enrolled at Roslyn would not be attending private facilities, but upon asking our parents many were using the 20 hours system to some extent.

One of my new entrant staff members also undertook an inquiry on “develop and implement a transition programme between Early Childhood and Roslyn School that assist in preparing 5 year olds more effectively for school” (appendix 2). It was interesting to note that we both came to similar conclusions be it through a different journey.

Also parents of enrolled students were given a survey to see how effectively we were currently transiting students to school (appendix 3)

My first idea was to operate a preschool in the grounds of the school. But after exploring all the ins and outs and red tape upon red tape I gave that idea up (for the time being). I started down this road as I wanted to include the community and families more with the learning development of the children so as a ‘village’ approach we can develop together strategies for the benefit of our students.

Finally – after a lot of corners and bumps in the road on my journey I have come up with a concept that I feel will meet the needs of our students, the parents and those that feel we need to all be at a certain level at a certain time – no matter of what previous experiences and learning.

I have presented this to my staff and the board and from 2014 the following programme will be in place. It will be reviewed closely; data will be collected from a variety of sources and feedback from parties concerned will be gathered.

So what’s going to happen?

Our aim is to provide an environment so students have a disposition to be learners, to take an interest, to become engaged, to take responsibility to become effective communicators and explorers – no matter what skills they bring with them.

To do this we are having a class called Tipu. This comes as an off shoot from the Ferns team name (years 1-2). It will have its own specific programme, will not be involved with the rest of the team teaching programme but will be included for assemblies, sports and the like.

It will:

- Be a hands on programme – instigated mainly by the student’s interests, cultural and skills
- Have a heavy emphasis upon oral language development
- Have a teacher aide support for the whole day
- Have a programme that allows for student taking responsibility for their own learning, being supportive of others through tasks given
- Have opportunities for preschool children to attend each afternoon from 2-3 which will allow for families to be involved
- Acknowledge students cultural background and develop a sense of belonging

Each student will be in the class for at least the first five weeks. This will allow for testing, observations to gauge any needs, any support from outside agencies. If the criteria which has been set is met along with discussions with parents, then the student will move into the next new entrant room where they will be in a team teaching environment. This ensures there is not such a huge range of learning needs and abilities within the next classes. The Tipu class will not be organised along the lines of a reception class but based loosely under the concept of the Developmental Domains of the Walker Learning Approach (appendix enclosed). The resource that I primarily used was "Play Matters Investigative learning for preschool to grade 2" by Karen Walker. This, I feel, will enable our students to develop and meet our aim of having inquiring and motivated students.

This programme allows the student investigation time where they can learn either individually or in small groups. The teacher's role is one of support, direction or extension. Each day several students take on the role of either the 'reporter', 'photographer' and the three focused students for that day reflect on what they have been doing, learning or working on during investigations. This is then followed by the formal group sessions and the students will use the experiences they have had while investigating earlier to call upon. The class may return to their investigations later in the day or further formal learning opportunities may take place.

The final session is one of reflection on the day.

This of course is a very vague description of the programme but the main areas that I find valuable is that the students:

- Are treated as individuals and their interests, learning and development are held as important
- The students take the majority of control of their own learning
- Important roles within the sessions are held by the students
- Parents and whanau are fully involved in the learning and class programme

Future thoughts

I would like to take some staff to visit classrooms in action in Australia to gain more understanding and ideas of perfecting the programme.

I would like to expand this model into other classes at the school

Final thoughts

Not all children are ready to learn the same thing, at the same time, in the same way. Not all children will be ready to meet benchmarks or literacy levels at the same time, as environmental and developmental influences impact on children's rate of learning. Students require empowerment, ownership, engagement and motivation as key criteria with which to learn and sustain learning and skills.

Providing this programme and environment of learning for our students may put them back onto the level playing field and continue to fuel their passion for learning.

I would like to thank my board for allowing me the time to delve into the area and to be able to reflect on possible systems and directions that could be taken for the benefit of our students.

I would also like to thank the staff for taking 'up the slack' especially my Deputy and Assistant Principals. Also I would like to thank the people who allowed me into their work places and homes to talk and observe some wonderful happenings.

This report is mainly written to try to clarify my thoughts and so I haven't gone into huge depths in areas but if anyone who is on a similar journey would like to contact me I would love to have a chat.

principal@roslyn.school.nz

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'J. How', written in a cursive style.



Principal's Sabbatical Inquiry Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for me as part of my information gathering inquiry around transition to school.

1. What type of pre-school establishment do you work in?

Government funded kindergarten Private

2. What is the average roll numbers?

3. What do you think your parents want from your establishment? (list top 4)

-
-
-
-

4. Do you have schools visiting/school information available for parents?

Yes No

Comment if wish

5. What do you think are parent's expectations from a school when they visit/enrol?

Any further comments if wish

Thank you once again
Joanne How
Principal
Roslyn School

Roslyn School's Teacher Inquiry 2013

Team Teaching

E-Learning

Highlight one

How will I measure this?

- # 6 week and 6 month data
- # Discussions with parents/caregivers
- # Questionnaire's to Families/Whanau
- # Enrolment numbers

What outcomes do I expect to happen as a result of this goal?

To Student Learning: Students will start in the New Entrant rooms with some familiarity for the class programme and with basic skills needed to be successful learners.

To achieve this I will... Develop an action plan for which I will explore our current practices and compare with Early Childhood Centres and other Primary Schools to develop a more suitable transition programme.

What do I know?

Our current transition to school programme consists of 3 school visits prior to starting school provided the child is enrolled early enough.

What are my learning needs?

The majority of New Entrants starting at Roslyn School are lacking in basic skills such as cutting, gluing, holding pens correctly and basic co-ordination skills.

Choose 1 learning need to develop as a goal... transitions to school to prepare New Entrants for success in the New Entrant class.



Reflection



appendix 2



TEACHER INQUIRY JOURNEY

2013

By Anna

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MY FOCUS QUESTION

How can we develop and implement an effective transition to school programme...one that can best meet the needs of the students at

Roslyn School.

WHY IT WAS CHOSEN:

- ❖ To review our current practices in terms of transitioning children to school.
- ❖ To investigate how others schools/centres were preparing their New Entrants.
- ❖ To raise the achievement of our New Entrants in their first year at Roslyn School.
- ❖ Personal Interests

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CURRENT TRANSITION TO SCHOOL
PROGRAMME AT ROSLYN SCHOOL:

- ❖ Parents/Caregivers contacted once enrolled to arrange at least 3 school visits prior to child starting.
- ❖ Hatchlings programme run on a Wednesday afternoon
- ❖ Visits to kindy's/centres to 'advertise' Roslyn School

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INVESTIGATING EFFECTIVE TRANSITION PROGRAMMES

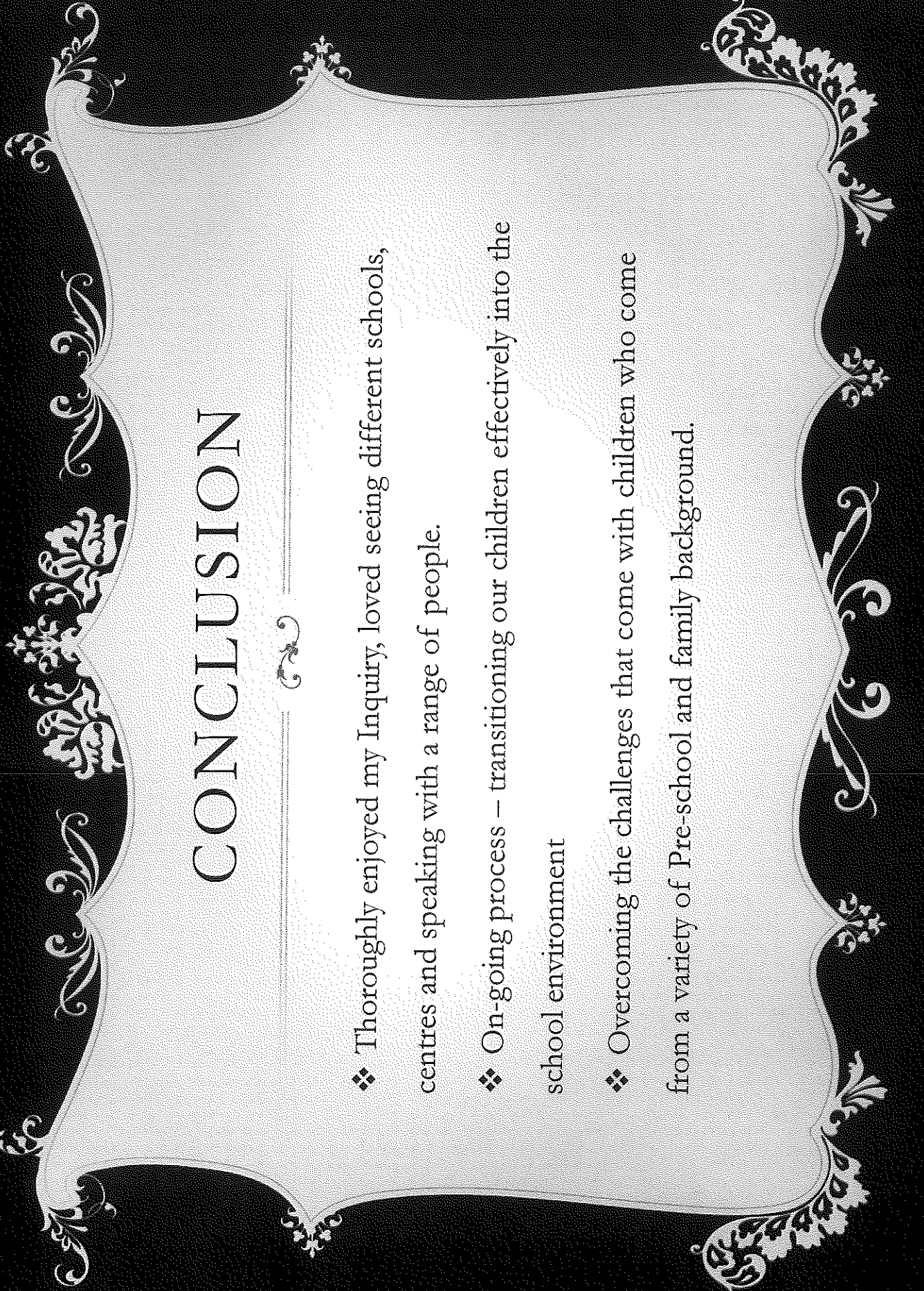
- ❖ Visited College Street and Whakarongo School to observe their Transition programme and to talk with Teachers about them.
- ❖ Visited a variety of Kindys/Early Childhood Centres
- ❖ Spoke with Teachers/Head Teachers/Parents of 4/5 year olds
- ❖ Readings/Research into Effective Programmes

WHAT I FOUND OUT:

- ❖ An effective transition programme is essential in preparing a child for school.
- ❖ Our parents are very happy with our transition programme but it needs to be changed to suit the needs of our children and the families enrolling in our school specifically.
- ❖ Some of the programmes I saw/heard about were fantastic but relied heavily on parental involvement and on children being enrolled in school at least 2 Terms prior to starting.
- ❖ The programmes run by Kindy's/Early Childhood Centres varies greatly with some offering specific programmes teaching Early Literacy and Numeracy and some centres focussing solely on play and well being with less of a focus on 'school stuff'.

NEXT STEPS

- ❖ New Entrant Parent Evening in Week 7
- ❖ Invitations to a range of families/centres
- ❖ Transition Class for 2014 (Tipu) in Room 12
- ❖ Continuing to build relationships with different kindys/centres/parents
- ❖ Continuing advertising the amazing things we offer at ROSLYN!

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CONCLUSION

- ❖ Thoroughly enjoyed my Inquiry, loved seeing different schools, centres and speaking with a range of people.
- ❖ On-going process – transitioning our children effectively into the school environment
- ❖ Overcoming the challenges that come with children who come from a variety of Pre-school and family background.



Transition Project

Parent survey for new students to this school

For each word please tick what you think is the nearest to the way your child was feeling on the morning of the first day at this school.

My child was probably feeling ...

Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all	
				Enthusiastic
				Excited
				Happy
				Confident
				Relaxed
				Worried
				Stressed
				Bored
				Uneasy
				Afraid

Other?

What things did we do that helped your child's move to this school?
(Preparation, information, open day, website ...)

What more could we do to help your child's move to this school be easier?

Did you, as a parent, get enough information so you could support your child?

How well has your child settled in to this school so far? (1 - 5 rating: 1 not very well at all - 5 extremely well)

1 2 3 4 5

If you are happy to be contacted to talk about your answers, please put your name and your child's name here:

My name: _____

My child's name: _____

THANK YOU 😊

We are trying to make the transition to this school better for students and families