

Effective Transition, Writing and Numeracy Programmes for Boys

1. What are the features of effective transitioning between schools
2. The features of effective writing programmes for boys
3. The feature of effective numeracy programme for boys

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Methodology/Findings/Implications and Conclusions

My sabbatical research looked at three issues:

1. Good transitioning processes between contributing schools including that found in our Kahui Ako
2. Effective writing progress for boys
3. Effective maths and numeracy programmes for boys

I visited 10 All Boys Secondary Schools in New Zealand and two schools in greater London and thank the Principals and Headmasters for their time and patience and that of their staff.

I visited and researched good practice within our Kahui Ako looking at how to improve our transitioning processes as well as researching good practice in boys writing and numeracy/maths learning.

Transitioning from full Primary and Intermediate schools can be a challenging task for young students. They leave their familiar surroundings, teachers that they are familiar with and in the best part happy with and move to new surroundings, new ways of teaching, new rules and routines.

The transition of students to High School corresponds with important changes as these young people move into adolescence. Emotionally and psychologically these young learners are vulnerable and self-conscious often experiencing unpredictable mood swings. Socially, they have an intense need to belong and be accepted by peers while finding out where they sit in the big world. Intellectually they are curious learners who become capable of complex and critical thinking. They take on a moral understanding of what is happening, having a clearer interpretation of what is right and wrong. While this is happening the young learner is often experiencing a growth spurt with bodily changes that can cause awkward and uncoordinated movements (ERO 2007)

It is extremely important that these young learners experiencing significant change in their lives make a positive transition to their new school (McGee et. al. 2003) found that there is a strong correlation between students having difficulty transitioning to schools and the likelihood of dropping out of school.

Features of Successful Transitioning in New Zealand and UK Schools

1. Year 9 test boundaries, have clear rules. Boys don't like uncertainty or "grey areas" leads to testing rules and to see which ones are important.
2. Strengthen peer networks, class and team building crucial. Here they can forge and develop friendships. Schools must be prepared for the increased importance of peer pressure for their young.
3. Teacher attention is the key. Boys need to know early that teachers care about them. These students have traditionally moved from a one teacher classroom to a high school where they can have ten or more teachers in any one year.
4. Involvement of the family. Students are more likely to transition safely if discussions about their new school, options taken, their teachers, when they and their families have had appointments to discuss ideas and issues.
5. Rules, guidelines and expectations are clearly explained, especially why they exist and the meaning behind them.
6. Team building and opportunities to connect with their new school, peers and teachers at the earliest possible time.
7. Teacher/student relationships are crucial. Every lesson should involve positive teacher feedback and feed forward to each student.
8. Plentiful opportunities to become involved in sport and co-curricular activities.
9. Cultural Importance. Successful transitioning progress reference cultural identity particularly Māori and Pasifika students. They all report transitioning students are always more successful when they feel their whakapapa and heritage is involved.

10. A strong understanding of prior learning, strengths and areas of development is gained from their previous schools. This way there is a connection between schools and curriculum.
11. Make learning relevant. It is important that boys understand why they are learning this topic, idea: When they know they have to learn volume or area, if they are going to be a builder they understand and accept its importance.
12. An emotionally and physically safe environment is the foundation of all good transitioning progress. Strong anti-bullying programmes, strong emotional support mechanisms in schools are evident in successful schools.
13. They achieve success. Students will transition more successfully when they succeed at school. All learning should be pitched at a level that is both challenging and achievable with ample opportunity for students learning to be rewarded and acknowledged. Learning needs are specific to each student and teaching where ever possible should be individually targeted for each student.
14. Students with complex and high needs must be resourced adequately with compassion and understanding.

Features of Local Transition

Establish a close relationship between all contributing schools, the idea that we value them and their work is crucial. It is a no-blame foundation we are all working together to help these boys.

- Establish procedures for visiting contributing schools
- Be clear about what data and information you need
- Don't impose your enrolment timetable on them, work with schools
- Give parents of Year 8 boys help to manage the enrolment documentation so they can easily complete forms
- Have personal interviews with year 8 parents and whanau to discuss secondary school and rules and regulations

- Be sensitive to high needs students, but collect as much detailed information as possible, what their issues are, what works, what doesn't
- Be open to Year 8 students concerns about going to secondary school. Treat these seriously
- Use open days to invite Year 8 students in to experience in advance the secondary school environment.
- Encourage Year 8 boys to look positively towards this transition to take up the challenge to become an "Akina Man"
- Highlight the large number of opportunities at secondary school; different options, extra-curricular activities, cultural opportunities.
- Highlight the pastoral care system, where every student is seen as important and that there are plenty of teachers looking after them
- Informal get-togethers such as family BBQs help break down concerns
- Boys love to belong to a peer group so every opportunity to join sport, culture, music, drama groups is encouraged
- Invite parents to Day 1 Powhiri
- Form Teachers ring and make contact with all boys in the first 2 weeks to introduce themselves.
- Be responsive to cultural backgrounds, understanding the importance of this particularly with Māori and Pasifika students

Effective Writing Programmes for Boys

- Boys need the opportunity to talk about their writing, identify difficulties, exploring their ideas
- Include family and whanau encouraging them to give positive feedback 'how neat their writing is'
- Increasing use of digital technologies such as google apps, boys engagement and motivation towards writing improves
- Teachers are 'spiral of inquiry' to consistently monitor the effectiveness of their approach to teaching writing
- UK research shows boys are half as likely to enjoy writing as girls. The first ingredient for successful writing programmes for boys is finding a topic that interests them - use older boys as role models, reading at assemblies.

- Like everything boys need a good, positive relationship with a teacher to encourage them to read and write. They will only engage with the teacher if they believe the teachers cares and the work interests them.
- Boys like challenges, they need a purpose and the opportunity to measure themselves
- Boys often like to write about exaggerations, funny, silly things, songs, action events, success in sport, violence, gore, mayhem, be tolerant of their writing choice
- Beginning writing exercises should include brain storming, small chunk format
- Boys need help to structure writing, step by step instructions with clear expectations and a formula to work to.
- Tap into boys real life experiences, use blogs

UK Writing

Tag images and photos into their writing, use windows, movie maker, to bring together. Digital story telling is commonly used. Getting them onto a keyboard as soon as possible. Boys need an environment which is different to that which we have been offering them in the past.

Encourage them to be storytellers. Remember boys are more fragile than they appear

Give boys the opportunity to discuss between themselves the relevance of writing their ideas and thoughts. These cooperative experiences encourage a socially constructed acceptance of reading and writing.

Boys need to be given specific feedback and feed forward with writing. They need structure.

Maths and Numeracy

There is mixed research into gender differences in Maths and if anything the gap size is small. Research does show that from an early age boys are more confident and less anxious than girls about maths. This confidence may explain

the small gap that exists and that it may be this confidence not ability that is responsible for boys being perceived as better in maths.

It is suggested also that it may be due to career choice with boys traditionally choosing maths and maths related career choices such as engineering and computer science. This may come under question as there is an increasing percentage of women choosing engineering as a career choice.

From my visits and research, below are the following points that demonstrate a successful maths and numeracy programme in contributing schools.

1. Firstly in regard to Māori boys, again the most important determination of success with these students is the relationship that boys have with their teachers. Māori boys are relationship learners and most if not all teaching will fail without the Māori boy respecting the teacher and the teacher respecting the students.
2. Maths is about critical thinking. It is the process that is important. Boys like to “work things out” so encourage maths process not math memorizing, memorizing maths solutions in itself will not promote critical thinking.
3. Involve parents, again encourage parents to support school numeracy goals.
4. Structure maths lessons, sequential chunk sized lessons work with boys.
5. Like all good teaching, maths and numeracy involved lifting student’s confidence, giving students the confidence to try things, take risks, discuss with others. An inclusive classroom environment is crucial to a successful maths and numeracy programme.
6. Use a variety of maths and numeracy assessment methods and where possible use problem-centred activities rather than assessments that require straight memorization.
7. Connect numeracy and maths to the whole curriculum. Numeracy is not the responsibility of just the Maths Department; like literacy it requires coordination within the school teachers to produce a unified consistent approach.
8. Extra resourcing and time needs to be available to students with high learning needs.
9. Google apps offer boys the opportunity to access numeracy and problem solving activities in a fun, stimulating environment.

10. Effective learning experiences require a good understanding of knowing what they already know and building on this prior knowledge.
11. Use group work as much as possible, students working together cooperatively facilitates problem solving. Activities which encourage students to explore, explain, extend and evaluate their progress are key stages in numeracy.
12. Good numeracy progress allow teachers to observe and comment on each other's practices, sharing good practice.