

– **Sabbatical Report 2012**

Greg Riceman
Raureka School
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– **Purpose:**

To observe, assess and analyse appraisal and mentoring programmes used in Primary Schools and to review and implement the current Raureka Appraisal/ mentoring system based on this observation.

– **Acknowledgements:**

I wish to thank the Raureka School Board of Trustees for their encouragement and support to apply for this leave. This was a wonderful opportunity to investigate the appraisal processes used in various schools in New Zealand and in Queensland.

I would also like to thank the Principals of the schools, I visited, who freely shared their processes with me and gave up their valuable time to do this.

I am also very grateful to the Ministry of Education for making sabbaticals available to New Zealand Principals.

– **Background**

Appraisal is prescribed to be carried out in all schools in New Zealand. Chapter 5 in the 2010 OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes report states ‘... teacher performance has a strong link with student outcomes’ I believe then that it is imperative for us all to ensure that we have the best possible teachers working with our children. The report continues by stating that ‘the performance management framework aims to ensure that all students in New Zealand schools experience effective teaching.

Appraisal is ... ‘used for different purposes ... teacher registration, attestation ... for salary progression and improving professional practice.

Currently the ... ‘framework of standards used for teacher appraisal focusses on professional values, knowledge, practices and relationships, and includes an expectation that teachers analyse and reflect on evidence to improve their teaching practice.’ The recently introduced ... ‘Registered Teachers Criteria (RTC) place a much stronger focus on student learning outcomes, including teachers’ analysis and use of student assessment information.’

Appraisal is expected to ...‘include self-evaluation, classroom observations and interviews but according to a study carried by Sinnema (2005) “limited attention is given to student learning in appraisal...”’

The report also discusses methods of developing teacher capability in appraisal by using classroom practice that is linked to student achievement. This means that teachers become more aware of effective data gathering and analysis of data to help improve students learning. (OECD 2010)

These statements refer to the teacher knowing their students and building a programme that best meets students' individual needs and this being appraised to assess how well this is being done.

Russell Bishop has carried out extensive research about how to improve Maori student achievement. Bishop (et al., 2009) argues that 'Effective teachers of Maori students create a culturally appropriate and responsive context for learning in their classroom... the teachers know and understand how to bring about change in Maori students... they care for the students ... building and nurturing a supportive and loving environment (Manaakitanga). They care for the performance of their students (Mana motuhake). They create a secure, well-managed learning environment by incorporating routine pedagogical knowledge with pedagogical imagination ... building individual roles and responsibilities to achieve (Whakapiringatanga). They engage in effective teaching interactions with Maori students as Maori (Wananga). They use a range of strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their students (Ako), and they promote, monitor and reflect on outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in educational achievement for Maori students (Kotahitanga)'.

Bishop's above mentioned strategies, although specifically targeted for Maori students, could also be used to help improve the achievement of all students. These also relate to the current appraisal processes as outlined by the OECD 2010 report where teachers are expected to teach to the students' needs, use effective teaching practices, develop good relationships and use data to achieve the best for the learners. These could also form the basis of the appraisal process.

– **Method**

In my sabbatical proposal I was to visit six different schools in New Zealand and one in Australia to look at how these schools undertook appraisal.

I visited one school in Queensland where the Principal discussed the processes of appraisal in his school.

I visited eight schools in the North Island in different regions (Waikato, Auckland, Northland, Bay of Plenty and Poverty Bay). The schools were from a range of deciles (from 1-10). I talked to each principal to discuss how each school undertakes appraisal of its teaching staff.

Each New Zealand Principal discussed the appraisal process within their school, the registered teacher criteria and how this has been implemented within the school.

– **Findings**

The Queensland Principal discussed his schools approach to managing staff as there is no official appraisal system in the State.

The principal, however, has built up a system of trust that allows him and his management team the ability to walk into the classes to see how the teacher is performing. He believes that there is a possibility that the National Professional Standards for teachers will be implemented and then an appraisal system will follow.

A school wide professional development plan also assists with monitoring of teacher performance, although this is informal.

The principal sees his role as maintaining programmes that meet the needs of the students in the school. A shared instructional leadership model is used and all staff adheres to this. Walk throughs, visits, work samples, assessment tasks and data collection also provide evidence of professional ability.

Feedback is provided to staff as well as an expectation that reflection on current practice is undertaken.

The strength of the school is its collegial approach and a strong measure of TEAM.

This is similar to the findings of Gary Moss who visited Queensland in 2005. Moss (2005) states "in Queensland ... talk of teacher appraisal 'systems' seemed to have little meaning ... All of these schools seemed to have a strong emphasis on effective and reflective teaching, sharing good practice and on equipping students for a different future.

The importance of the teachers' role was reinforced by the State Education Minister in a recent education weekly "if students are to fulfil their full potential for their future our number one priority must be supporting our teachers to be the best teachers they can possibly be - the true point of leverage is the quality of the teaching".

Appraising teacher effectiveness and fostering good practice were integrated into the school's professional development focus and teaching programme."

- **New Zealand Schools**

Each of the eight schools visited had an appraisal system in place and each met the intent of the appraisal criteria as written in the 2010 OECD report. Each schools approach to appraisal suited its needs and is aimed at improving teacher capability and also improving student achievement. While there were similarities between schools each one was slightly different. Two of the schools used walk throughs as the basis for their appraisal.

In most schools visited appraisal is worked as part of the overall strategic planning and professional development for the school. The appraisal is linked to the school goals with all staff having to work with targeted children. In these schools teachers have to identify at risk children in their classes and then plan programmes to improve learning. This then forms the basis of the appraisal cycle.

Teachers develop goals for the children at risk and this is monitored. Teachers understand that all planning must be meaningful, curriculum based and differentiated. This means that all programmes are easily identifiable and all children can be tracked throughout the year, it also means ongoing development and achievement all the time for both the students and the teachers.

All principals talked about appraisal supporting professional development and being of benefit for the children. One principal stated that 'appraisal should provide transparency, accountability and outcomes for school. It should also benefit the stakeholders of the school, namely the children.'

The schools using walk throughs had slightly different methods; ranging from two walk throughs per term to four to five per teacher. The Principals reported that; 'Walk throughs are designed to improve capability. A report is written and this formed the basis of the appraisal review in their schools. Appraisal is used for PD, to assess how well this is impacting on the pupils' achievement.

Teachers observe practice and this has developed a collaborative staff, where each member is supporting each other providing ongoing support and ideas to help improve learning and teaching.

Walk throughs include ongoing monitoring of planning, the use of the class description and achievement data. This triangulates information and gives an overall picture of what is happening in each class. Staff get an end of year report outlining where to and what next.

The walk throughs are also based around student engagement in learning, classroom management, checking to see if the teaching is pitched at the right levels and seeing how the students are included in learning i.e. student voice. Each walk through is discussed with the teacher, empowering them as it enables all staff to talk about what is going on. The dialogue empowers teachers and they form plans, from this, to improve teaching.

Each teacher has a guiding question for each visit. When I visited the school the key questions were; 'Are all students engaged? How do you know?'

The teacher and the mentor talk and discuss what has happened during the observation and then they write a plan about what to do to improve classroom practice. This is based around the question 'what would the classroom look like if we achieved it?' Support is provided to try and achieve this and this then forms the plan for the next walk through observation.

This has seen a change in dynamics within the school as teachers get more feedback and this enables them to think about how they can help others improve learning. PD has also improved and everyone can see the benefits for themselves and for everyone else as well. Another benefit has been that professional meetings have changed to be more focused on learning instead of management. Now the overall aim is to empower and be successful and find ways to ask the powerful question that helps support each teacher.

- Implications

Our school appraisal system has elements of all of the systems used in the schools I visited. Our system includes an observation carried out by a fellow teacher, an observation carried out by the team leader appraising the progress being made in our current years professional development programme. We also include a formal observation of class programmes, use of achievement information and a record of professional development log (RTC) and how this has benefited the teacher and children. This is followed up with an interview and written report, providing any necessary areas for development. The formal observation is repeated at the end of the year with another classroom visit and check of the RTC. It is followed up with a written report being made to help guide any necessary development for the following year.

Our last ERO (2010) report supported this with the following comments being made. It stated the following;

‘Strategic priorities of literacy, numeracy, formative practices and rich learning are underpinned by strong professional development, so that staff share an understanding of good quality teaching. Growing consistency has been achieved through a strong framework of guidance and support, responsive to students’ learning needs and to teachers’ appraisal goals.

Teachers understand the importance of using achievement data to focus instruction and to differentiate learning programmes, building on student knowledge, skills and understanding...The senior management team tracks student progress over time...The teaching team demonstrates high expectations for all students. Sound provision is made for individuals requiring additional support, using well-planned interventions. Referrals are systematically managed and progress toward goals is monitored. Teachers use extension activities to challenge talented students...Change and improvement are managed in a planned and purposeful way. Analysed data identify patterns of strength and weakness across the school. Strong processes of self review assist leaders to set priorities and evaluate progress. The approach and pace of change are thoughtfully planned to build teacher capability, to consolidate new developments and sustain gains. Attestation and appraisal effectively support school improvement through reflective and collegial practice.’

In order to strengthen our appraisal system, in line with MoE requirements, we will need to focus on ways to further develop and use methods that will help support our priority learners and to continue to provide evidence of ongoing achievement for our students by linking it to our professional development plan.

This can be done by continuing to have peer appraisals; where teachers visit each other to provide support for questions they have regarding the pedagogy being used in the classroom. This form of observation/mentoring provides both the observer/mentor and observee/mentee the opportunity to learn from

one another without having any judgement attached from a formal observation. This helps build collegial support and builds trust amongst the staff.

Our formal appraisal, carried out by the team leaders, will be able to focus on the current professional development and needs of the teacher. This method provides an accurate report of what is happening, other approaches that could be used and provide next steps for teachers as well as providing school wide evidence about the success of the current professional development.

Our attestation process, which is linked to the new registered teacher criteria, will focus on the teachers providing ongoing evidence of planned programmes that meet student needs, use of data, use of formative teaching practices and how teachers use student achievement data and information technology to support learning.

In my opinion, with the slight changes mentioned above, our appraisal system will meet the criteria quoted by one of the Principals. He stated 'appraisal should provide transparency, accountability and outcomes for school. It should also benefit the stakeholders of the school, namely the children.'

– References

Bishop, R., et al., Te Kotahitanga: Addressing educational disparities facing Maori students in New Zealand, Teaching and teacher Education (2009), doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.01.009

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