

Sabbatical Report Term Two 2012

SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS with community investment in a sustainable mentoring programme

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone involved in making sabbaticals part of the principals' collective. What a wonderful way to get head space; to investigate a topic of interest to benefit young people; and, apparently, to look younger ...

Folk involved in education are generous people. Thank you especially to the following colleagues who gave me their time and intellectual property:

- Steve Bovaird, Principal, and Neil Waddington, Academic Advisor, of Lynfield College
- John Heyes, Principal; Ruth Luketina, Careers Advisor and Pathways Project Leader; and Viv Maskell, Head of Technology and Form Teacher of trial group, all of Mangere College
- Bruce Ritchie, Principal, and Sam Smith, Assistant Principal, of Massey High School
- Grant Jones, Principal of Newlands College
- Onehunga High School staff, board and students
- Robyn Jensen, Head of Guidance, and Fiona Gibson, Mentor for Maori, of Rangitoto College
- Professor Liz McKinley, Director; Joy Eaton, Deputy Director; and the rest of the team of the Starpath Project
- Nigel Hanton, Principal, and Dominic Killalea, Deputy Principal, of Wellington High School

Executive Summary

International research has indicated that parent involvement is associated with more effective mentoring programmes. One off programmes have generally been found to be ineffective; collaboration with existing programmes is more effective.

The Starpath Project has already demonstrated successful approaches to raising student achievement in a number of New Zealand secondary schools.

Starpath encourages students to follow their own path by identifying their goal, setting their direction and navigating their way with the aid of good data, sound advice, family and teacher support, and high quality teaching and learning.

The Starpath Project Annual Report 2012

Onehunga High School has now joined with other partner schools in the Starpath Project. We are very pleased to be included as a partner in this collaborative and responsive approach to optimising student success.

Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical was to investigate models of mentoring so that we might successfully develop a sustainable mentoring programme for Onehunga High School students that is a best fit for our community. The aim is for Onehunga High School students to realise their potential; to achieve personal excellence.

We have witnessed the significant, life changing difference that effective mentoring can make, for those students who have been fortunate to be selected for the programmes in which we have been involved. We want all students to be able to access the support that will provide *“the opportunity to achieve at the highest level, develop and pursue personal goals and to engage in a lifelong process of learning”* (Onehunga High School vision statement).

Our charter is written in three sections; these sections are entitled *Student Achievement, Student Engagement* and *Partnerships*. Student mentoring involves partnerships designed to positively impact student achievement and student engagement. It is perfectly aligned with the essence of our charter and is referenced in many intentions throughout, including a specific goal in the 2011 annual plan, which is to *begin to develop an Onehunga High School student mentor programme*. I should like one outcome of my research to be a clear strategic path toward realisation of this goal.

The Minister of Education’s foreword to the Statement of Intent 2011/12 – 2016/17 includes:

This Government has a goal of every young person achieving NCEA Level 2 or an equivalent qualification. This will enable them to participate in further education and training, and to be productive members of the workforce. Effective teaching and enhanced engagement and retention practices are vital to ensure students are present and achieving in the schooling sector.

Many students at Onehunga High School have been, and are, involved in mentoring of a variety of kinds, both formal and informal, with outcomes ranging from little

measurable impact to positive and sustained improvement in levels of achievement and personal success. We know that excellent teaching and learning is founded in quality relationships. The development of mentoring and associated skills for students, teachers, support staff, parents and members of the wider community will further enhance teaching and learning for all in our community, and aligns with the Minister's foreword.

We believe that effective mentoring and/or academic counselling will provide the foundation for all our students to expect, and achieve, personal excellence.

Rationale and Background

Onehunga High School formally partners with, and our students are involved in mentoring through:

- First Foundation
- MATES
- Project K
- YWCA Future Leaders

Students are also involved in:

- Peer Support (all Year 9 students participate in the Peer Support programme led by trained Year 13 students who are selected through application and interview)
- mentoring arranged through our SENCO on an individual or small group basis
- mentoring arranged through members of staff, particularly Brent Wagner, Deputy Principal responsible for student leadership, on an individual or small group basis
- informal mentoring through co-curricular activities including sports, health, performing arts, cultural groups
- mentoring on an individual basis through a variety of community organisations

We have trialled many initiatives over the years, including a number which were supported through the Student Engagement Initiative, which was a constructive Ministry of Education initiative in which we were involved for nine years.

Methodology

In order to gain greater knowledge of effective practice, I:

- read and researched relevant literature including that of the Youth Mentoring Network and Starpath

- visited several New Zealand schools serving different communities, that have successful mentoring and/or academic counselling models, and interviewed people involved
- collaborated with colleagues at Onehunga High School to determine the best model for our community

Findings

The value of this sabbatical to me was immense. Of particular impact were the visits to other schools and talking with colleagues about models they are using, as well as the opportunity to read and reflect. We are very clear about implementing a sustainable, best fit model for our circumstance – as Cognition’s Chris Jager commented in regard to the AimHi ICT PD project, “What’s important about this project is that it’s a process, not a prescribed programme – the schools are using the data and assessment tools differently ...” To have this opportunity to evaluate a best process fit for us, was invaluable.

The following excerpt from the ‘What Works in Youth Development’ series, co-funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand and the Ministry of Youth Development as part of the Health Research Council of New Zealand’s Partnership Programme, summarises learnings in terms of how we have chosen to proceed:

As international research (e.g., DuBois et al., 2002) has indicated that parent involvement is associated with more effective programmes, it seems worthwhile to examine this issue in greater detail.

One-off programmes, for the purpose of research (e.g., Master’s thesis) or for single-school use, are largely ineffective. This is also probably reflected in there being a moderate association between external evaluation and greater programme effectiveness, as one-off programmes tend to be evaluated by the person administering the programme. Great caution should be taken by individuals who are considering this avenue of study or intervention as these programmes, generally-speaking, may not have the appropriate knowledge of best practice and the support and resources required to be effective ... Those within schools, who are interested in starting a mentoring programme, should collaborate with existing programmes that have been shown to be effective.

New Zealand Youth Mentoring Research 2010 - The Effectiveness of Youth Mentoring Programmes in New Zealand, July 2010, Reviewers: Susan Farruggia PhD Pat Bullen PhD Ann Dunphy MA Frank Solomon MA Efeso Collins MA

What we determined during my sabbatical was that the Starpath Project ticked every box for us. The Starpath Project for Tertiary Participation and Success is a project that is led by the University of Auckland, in partnership with the government.

Starpath's Data Utilisation, Academic Counselling and Target Setting (DUACTS) programme provides an holistic approach that is focused on using data better to enable informed decisions to be made by the students themselves, appropriately supported by their whanau and school. Starpath enables schools to work effectively with individual students and their families, as well as groups of students. It provides an evidence based approach which includes the tools and support to enable schools to appropriately lift the performance of the students in their community.

Included in Starpath's third newsletter is a synopsis of the DUACTS programme which outlines the programme under the following headings:

1. Establishing evidential databases
2. Ongoing target setting by a specially trained Student Achievement Manager
3. Tracking and monitoring of student learning and academic progress
4. Academic counselling to support students' progress toward set targets
5. Family engagement

Implications

As a result of our research, we decided to implement a model based on the Starpath Project if indeed we were not able to be included as a partner school. The results from our readings, and the evidence, both hard and soft, from existing Starpath partner schools was compelling.

We are indebted to Professor Liz McKinley, Director of the Starpath Project, and all members of the Starpath team, for recently including us as a partner school. We are excited to work in partnership with the Starpath team, to maximise the academic performance and lifelong achievement of our students.

This sabbatical report and the baseline data gathered by the Starpath team will be included for consideration in updating our 2012-2014 charter and in developing our 2013 annual plan.

Conclusions

There seems to be a plethora of programmes/initiatives/projects available, and oft times pushed at schools. Sometimes these are well considered and they are always well intentioned. However, repeatedly in recent years, these offerings have been ill timed, poorly presented and part of someone else's agenda. Sometimes they fit with the school community and the school's plan; many times they do not. Although not my usual viewpoint, I relate to a growing cynicism regarding a number of initiatives which are "doing to" rather than "partnering with".

The opportunity to step back, research and reflect on the best next steps for mentoring and/or academic counselling of Onehunga High School students was welcome, timely and worthwhile.

It seems appropriate to conclude with the story of Starpath:

As the first navigators crossed the Pacific they followed the stars from island to island.

At the beginning of their journey, they found the star which marked their direction, and followed it until it sank towards the horizon.

Then they located the next star on the star path, and the next, and the next, until they reached their destination.

References

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