
Sabbatical Report

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Greymouth

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Inquiry Question:

Can a strategic leadership approach that increases whānau engagement in education accelerate student learning for *priority students*?

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Ministry of Education for giving Principals the opportunity to have a sabbatical. This to me shows that principals are valued for their contribution as leaders. Having the opportunity to step back and reflect on my leadership has been an extremely valuable experience that I have thoroughly enjoyed. This sabbatical has enabled me to build on professional networks and challenge myself professionally.

Secondly, I would like to thank the Cobden School Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical application and acknowledge the Cobden School staff and in particular, Mrs Mandy Dodds for stepping up as acting principal during my absence.

During my sabbatical, I visited with the following individuals and schools:

- Marg Raynor, Metis Education, Brock & York University, Ontario Canada
- Rosanne Monague, Christian Island, Ontario, Canada
- Cath Martin, Hokitika Primary
- Wayne Wright, Reefton Area School
- Shane Baillie, Ross School
- Yvonne Apanui (West Coast Tai Poutini RTLB)
- Karyn MacRae (West Coast Tai Poutini RTLB)

I have felt privileged that so many leaders and community members both here and overseas have shared their insights and passion for education, for this I thank them all.

Executive summary

From reviewing current research, literature and numerous interviews both here and overseas, building trust with whānau is the vital component identified that will act as the main driver for building positive and sustained relationships and partnerships with school. Only then will authentic power sharing occur and accelerated achievement for our priority learners.

Purpose

- To further strengthen Cobden School's action plans in order to further develop whānau engagement in order to accelerate priority learners and in particular Māori student achievement.
- Consider implications of current NZ and international research and how these apply to Cobden School's current whānau engagement.
- This professional learning will involve planned domestic and international school visits that have successful whānau engagement that has accelerated student achievement for priority learners.

Background Information

- Cobden School have been part of Positive Behaviour for Learning School-wide since 2010.
- From Student Achievement Function involvement term 4, 2012-term 1, 2013, our deliverable was: **Organisational Leadership** - Trustees, Leadership and Change Team will identify and implement strategies that cultivate an increased focus on priority learner needs and opportunities for parents, families and whānau to contribute to a culturally inclusive and responsive teaching and learning partnership. This has become a school wide focus and is supported within the school's annual plans. The SAF action plan implementation & review has highlighted the need for a more in-depth investigation on whānau participation.
- More recently, 2013-2014, we have been part of a Learning Change Network, whānau engagement being one of our change priorities.

The focus questions that were used to guide my inquiry were:

- What specific leadership skills and strategies were used to engage whānau that enabled accelerated progress of *priority learners* to occur?
- How do schools monitor progress for their priority learners and engage whānau in this process?
- What does the current research information suggest in relation to engagement and how can this guide or clarify the practical aspects of this inquiry?

Methodology

- Investigated & reflected on current NZ/overseas literature and research, around community engagement with schools.
- Three schools were selected of similar demographics: schools that have implemented actions to increase whānau engagement. These visits provided a snapshot of the relationship between partnerships and accelerated progress.
- Local RTLB were interviewed that had extensive experience with community engagement initiatives.
- Made comparisons/contrasts: using international contexts where achievement levels for indigenous students have accelerated as the result of targeted initiatives.
- Visited key locations within the Ontario province, Canada.
- Collated, reflected and evaluated to provide some next steps for ***“What could be the way forward for Cobden school to engage whānau for priority learners to make accelerated progress.”***

Findings

From my sabbatical, after numerous interviews with leaders, whānau and agencies trust has been the overarching theme.

- Leaders need to be open and honest and take time to establish communication early on in building relationships with whānau and explicitly establish trust.
- The schools that I visited all were actively involved in building relationships with new families early on, the leaders acknowledged the positive impact from this.
- Using social media and technology to increase engagement.

In this digital age, leaders are using social media to promote learning. This can provide a place that is non-threatening for whānau as it encourages participation for those who may not feel comfortable coming into school. This communication tool can support breaking down barriers and building trust and increasing whānau engagement via online environments. It is a way that school leaders, teachers and students are having learning conversations with whānau. From my interviews, leaders are using a variety of online environments and acknowledge that this has assisted with promoting the school as a place of learning.

- **Building Capabilities**

As leaders we need to shift our mind-set from whānau engagement seen as a job of just the leader to a shared responsibility. Initiatives such as Positive Behaviour for Learning School-wide and Learning Change Networks are examples of this.

*Leaders of schools have a diverse job that is consistently focused on human relationships as underpinning positive school climate. Trust is the invisible underpinning of collaboration and learning. Many researchers assumed that trust was hard to develop early in a relationship, but this is not the case. People would rather extend a measure of trust to someone until they have reason to distrust. (Excerpt from **In Conversation, Ontario. an Interview with Dr Megan Tschannen-Moran, Professor of Educational Leadership, Williamsburg, Virginia**).*

Uncovering myths about trust from The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything, Covey (2006)

<i>Myth</i>	<i>Reality</i>
<i>Trust is soft.</i>	<i>Trust is hard, real, and quantifiable.</i>
<i>Trust is slow.</i>	<i>Nothing is as fast as the speed of trust.</i>
<i>Trust is built solely on integrity.</i>	<i>Trust is a function of both character (which includes integrity) and competence.</i>
<i>You either have trust or you don't.</i>	<i>Trust can be created and destroyed.</i>
<i>Once lost, trust cannot be restored.</i>	<i>Though difficult, in most cases lost trust can be restored.</i>
<i>You can't teach trust.</i>	<i>Trust can be effectively taught and learned, and it can become a leverageable, strategic advantage.</i>
<i>Trusting is too risky.</i>	<i>Not trusting people is greater risk.</i>
<i>Trust is established one person at a time.</i>	<i>Establishing trust with the one establishes trust with many.</i>

Implications

How has this inquiry impacted on future needs and direction? Without shared understanding, no initiative will be successful. All stakeholders must be seen as equal partners. As I have been able to gather information from a variety of stakeholders, therefore viewing engagement through different lenses, this has enabled me to get a more accurate picture on what success could look like.

- To change of mind set of whānau so they are willing to contribute to student learning.

Most leaders and community members interviewed acknowledged that there have been trust issues that have stemmed from the local community. This has taken, in some cases years to heal. Leaders need to drive initiatives that reconnect whānau with school to gain a holistic view of the students in order to accelerate student achievement.

- Has whānau engagement initiatives impacted on accelerated achievement for the learners?
 - The interviewees believe that whānau engagement initiatives are making a difference for the learners, they want them to be sustained and therefore small but strong steps need to be taken.
 - Many stated some initiatives implemented to engage whānau needed more time to be established and 2015 data will show the true impact, as these filter down to the core business of teaching and learning.
 - Many leaders stated that through self-review changes have been implemented.
 - Many leaders see that they need to formalise these initiatives through action plans for initiatives to remain focused.

Benefits

- Once trust and positive relationships with whānau is established, this will lead to inclusiveness and strength based practise.
 - Whānau will feel valued as they have a voice and they will then feel comfortable sharing aspirations for their children.
 - Whānau will engage in korero around high expectations.
 - Co construction will happen
 - Students will feel more valued.
- Trust is the new competency that underpins all collaboration.
- Leaders are needing to be honest and open with whānau and it is their responsibility to ensure whānau are looked after... Manaakitanga.
- Cultural inclusiveness, Ka Hikitia Managing Success, provides schools with the tools/support that is evidence based.

Conclusions

From the international research the common thread is around creating a shared vision. The leader drives this alongside teachers, whānau and students. The shared vision can only come about when all parties have trust.

There have been many questions that have challenged my thinking that will need to be considered for future planning:

1. “How can I, as a leader, continue to gain trust from the community, so they feel valued as contributors in their children’s learning?”
2. Do we have a shared understanding of trust?
3. How has trust impacted on engagement and how can technology enhance online whānau engagement?

Emerging next steps:

- Invite whānau to be part of drafting an action plan for 2015 that has a major focus on building a shared understanding of trust among all stakeholders. This will then be the solid foundation for building relationships to increase engagement and long term accelerated progress for priority learners. This action plan will have an emphasis on student learning.
- Use Community Engagement self-review tool (SAF rubrics for assessing school capability)
- Community self-review of Charter (alongside BOT) which allows whānau to have a voice as to what is needed for their children to grow healthy and strong and reach their full potential and hence formalising a graduate profile.
- Implementation of Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017 promotes a team effort. It requires everyone who plays a role in education to take action and work together.
Productive partnerships are based on mutual respect, understanding and shared aspirations. They are formed by acknowledging, understanding and celebrating similarities and differences.
- Using online environments more effectively to engage whanau through sharing student success.

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