

Sabbatical Report

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Iain Murray, Principal
Emmanuel Christian School.
Christchurch 8053
New Zealand

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
FOCUS QUESTION	2
A DEFINING FRAMEWORK	2
DATA COLLECTION	3
OVERSEAS SCHOOLS	3
NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL	3
NEW ZEALAND BASED SURVEY.....	3
A SCHOOLS PERSPECTIVE	3
TABLE 1. SURVEY RESULTS.....	3
TABLE 2. SURVEY RESULTS.....	4
KEY COMPONENTS	4
INSTRUCTIONAL CAPABILITY	4
LEADERSHIP/CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP.....	4
FROM REVIEW TO IMPLEMENTATION	5
CURRICULUM ADEQUACY, DEPTH AND COVERAGE.....	5
DATA COLLECTION.....	5
TEACHERS EFFECTIVE USE OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS	5
SELF-REVIEW FREQUENCY	5
STUDENT PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT DATA	5
STUDENT VOICE	6
COMMUNITY / PARENTAL INPUT	6
SCHOOL COMMENTS:.....	6
SUMMARY	6

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Focus Question

Research, investigate, and consider the key components for a successful self-review process in a restricted composite year 1–10 school, within a curriculum self-review context.

A Defining Framework

In order to “define” a framework in which to operate, I chose to use a statement from the New Zealand Education Review Office as a starting point, and used the underlying concepts of “how and what is to be evaluated”, “building capacity and capability through the process”, “improvement and accountability as outcomes”.

“The Education Review Office uses its external evaluation process to support school development and build the capacity and capability of schools to undertake ongoing internal evaluation (self-review) for both improvement and accountability.”

Ref: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/framework-for-school-reviews/self-review/>

Data collection

Interviews

During my course of study, 11 schools were visited. I conversed with 11 principals, 6 Deputy/assistant principals and nine teachers, also, a short survey was sent to 45 schools in New Zealand.

Overseas Schools

- 2 x international schools
- 3 x local schools

New Zealand School

- 6 State/State Integrated schools, each school had students in either year 1-10 or 1-13
- Survey

New Zealand based survey

- 45 State/State Integrated schools surveyed
- 29 responses received

A Schools perspective

Significant variation in self-review practices was evident, understanding of self-review, importance, content, depth, consultation with students, community and subsequent review outcomes.

Table 1. Survey results and data collected face to face (range 27 to 29 responses)

Q: Who was responsible for leading the review?	Never	Rarely	Mostly	Always	Total responses
Principal / Head teacher	-	-	1	28	29
Senior Management/HoD	-	2	10	17	29
Teachers	1	14	7	4	29
Support Staff	18	5	4	-	27
External professionals (i.e a visiting teacher or curriculum specialist)	11	15	2	1	28
Students	9	6	9	7	29
Parents / Community	12	6	5	6	29
Board of Trustees / Governors**	-	-	-	-	-

**All schools stated they provided a report(s) to their board of trustees or governors. The boards/governors were not directly involved in the review process. Typically, a summary of findings and or recommendations was presented by the principal, senior management or a curriculum leader.

Principals, senior management and teachers are the main contributors to the self-review process, external professionals such as visiting teachers or curriculum specialists sometimes contribute, however, support staff (administration, teacher aides, librarians) are rarely involved in the self-review process. About half of schools involved student voice in the review process.

Table 2. Survey results and data collected face to face (range 27 to 29 responses)

Q: How important is self-review viewed?	Never	Rarely	Mostly	Always	
is an important process for school improvement	-	2	9	18	29
enables curriculum improvement	-	1	20	8	29
supports teacher instructional capability	-	4	12	4	20
provides the school an opportunity to “see the big picture”	-	-	21	7	28
helps to sharpen assessment practices	-	1	12	14	27
improves student engagement	1	2	25	1	29
targets professional development in areas of need	-	-	17	12	29
assists developing a staff culture of reflection and action	3	12	8	6	29
identifies overall staff strengths	2	5	10	12	27
identifies overall staff weakness	2	4	10	12	28
identifies resourcing needs / gaps	-	1	4	24	29
We use a standardised template for self-review data collection	-	9	10	10	29
results of self-review are shared with staff	-	1	2	26	29
results of self-review are shared with students	-	21	3	4	28
results of self-review are shared with our parent community	5	13	7	4	29
our self-review is robust, broad and in-depth	-	-	19	10	29

Key components

The following components were identified by schools as an important factor(s) for robust, in-depth curriculum self-review.

Instructional capability

The ability of the teachers to deliver the curriculum confidently using a range of pedagogical methods featured highly in the responses, Principal and senior management mostly saw this as a key aspect of the review process. Some school did not explore instructional capability in any great depth; they, however, suggested instructional capability was assessed through the school professional development and appraisal systems.

Leadership/Curriculum Leadership

The drive and quality of leadership which promotes and encourages review and reflection was important. Most schools went on to say the curriculum review(s) should be lead by a teacher with extensive curriculum knowledge in the area of review. Schools with high school students typically used a subject specialist to lead curriculum review, primary schools, a senior member of staff i.e. principal, deputy or associate principal.

From Review to Implementation

Most schools believed establishing a positive open minded culture to self-review to improvement was important. The greatest challenge for school was translating review results into ongoing action for improvement.

Curriculum adequacy, depth and coverage

All schools agreed self-review was important, needed to be robust, broad, and in depth, there were, however, variations in what this looked like. In two instances schools believed they engaged with in-depth robust practices, in the opinion of the writer with was not the case based upon viewing other school practices.

Most schools appeared to have good processes in place although there was evidence of variation in review depth, with some aspects of review seen as more important than others. i.e. Instructional capability vs. resourcing.

Data collection

Data collection and analysis dominated the discussion, all but a few schools relied heavily upon summative data, and standardised in-house testing. National Standards (NZ only) was seen as a poor measure and was therefore rarely used to inform the review processes. The most common forms of data collected were:

- AsTTle/e-AsTTle (Mathematics- most strands, Reading, Writing)
- NZCER Progressive Achievement Tests (Mathematics, Reading, Listening, some science)
- NCEA all levels
- Six-year nets
- In-house assessment (linked to curriculum levels)
- Cambridge (overseas schools), Primary and secondary assessment

Teachers effective use of assessment tools (Diagnostic, formative and summative).

Given the limited time in classes and discussion with schools, time to gather information to make an informed statement on the effective use of these tools was limited. What was evident from New Zealand schools was the consistent use of AsTTle and Progressive achievement tests in a primary/middle school setting.

Self-Review Frequency

Most schools agreed a 3-year cycle of the review was appropriate; five schools followed a 2-year cycle. However, their review process did not appear to be as in depth as the schools choosing a three-year cycle. Four schools worked on a four-year review cycle. Two schools did not have any formal review cycle.

Student progress and achievement data

All schools were data rich, readily collecting numeracy and literacy results. With other curriculum areas such as languages and the Arts, information tended to be weighted toward a “soft” analysis of participation, and performance. Social Sciences, Technology and Science, tended to focus on display, a piece of created work etc. along with an “OTJ” to reflect overall achievement. Many New Zealand Schools used a “BPA” i.e., Basic, Proficient, Advanced method of summative assessment. The overseas international schools used summative grade point averages to track achievement and progress.

Within the context of longitudinal data, numeracy and literacy were easily tracked. Most other curriculum area (over a 2 or 3 year period) was difficult to make a judgement on. 12 New Zealand schools used BPA's to track longitudinal student progress in Technology, Science, Social Science.

Given the short time spent in each school and the limitations of the school survey, there was not enough time to look closely at how well schools triangulated their data to form valid and or accurate OTJ's.

NCEA was not considered in this instance.

Student voice

The collection of student voice was viewed differently by schools, while most schools believed it was important to seek feedback from students 15/29 schools never or rarely sought student's voice.

The schools not using or rarely using student voice identified time as the main factor restricting the collection and analysis of data.

Community / Parental input

Surprisingly little opportunity was offered by most schools for the community to contribute to the curriculum self-review process. The collection of Community / Parental input was viewed as poor, 21/29 schools never or rarely sought community input.

Of the 11 schools visited, three schools identified the need to involve the community more, 15 schools did not consult their community. A similar response was identified from the school survey, and with a range of comments similar to those that follow.

School comments:

- “The Community does not have a sufficient curriculum understanding, so we have not included them in the process (other than the Health curriculum which we have to consult over every two years” NZ decile seven schools)
- “We never receive any feedback from surveys, so we don't bother any more” decile three school
- “Significant effort has been put into encouraging parental involvement, results have been poor and responses dubious” decile four school
- “We always involve our school community, with some often interesting feedback and suggestions, it would be fair to say the reviews are not greatly influenced by this” decile eight school.
- “We see the need for better communication and contributions from our community, info that has been received has been of little value to date” decile six school
- “Community is not involved nor have they shown a desire to get involved in the process” decile five schools.

A general trend/attitude from most schools perceived the community was not qualified to make meaningful contributions to the curriculum review process, or interest was limited, but felt contribution to cultural content was important.

Most schools identified parents and community as not having sufficient “expertise”, such as teacher instructional capability, student voice, quality of programme delivery, and assessment practices. Some schools suggested time constraints for collection and analysis of information was a constraining factor, given a congested curriculum and other priorities.

It would appear underlying assumptions made by some schools on the capability of parents/community to contribute meaningfully could and should be challenged. Within most communities there are highly capable, well-educated people, broad life experiences, and differing opinions on what is and is not important, social and cultural views, the school demographic, and the majority of parents and community, do have their children's best interests at heart.

Summary

In summary, wide variation in the use and application of curriculum self-review tools was evident, most school did not involve community in the process. Numeracy and literacy data was heavily relied upon as was standardised testing for the purposes of diagnostic and summative assessment. There low levels of student's voice contributing to reviews, and many school felt the relevance and contributions for their communities were not sufficient to inform the review process; the reviews were mostly undertaken by subject specialists or senior management. A 3-year curriculum self-review process was preferred by most schools.