



Principals Sabbatical Report Paddy Ford 2017

“Investing in Educational Success (IES) is intended to raise the learning (ako) and achievement of all our children and young people”

It will do this by

“...encouraging greater collaboration between Kura/schools across the schooling system...”

Community of Learning Guide for Schools and Kura Ministry of Education 2016

Purpose

Looking at the impact on Principals of the cluster model made possible through IES funding

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge the Board and staff of Balclutha Primary School. Without their encouragement and help the process of applying for the sabbatical and undertaking the study required would not have been possible.

I wish to thank the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Educational Institute for their support and understanding in designing and promoting the sabbatical concept.

Background

The proposal as submitted came from the current interest in cluster models for schools as proposed through the Governments Investing in Education Success (IES)

Do the clusters work?
What makes them successful?
What are the pitfalls?
What are the funding models?
What do the participant schools think?

THE New Zealand Principals Federation (NZPF) survey in 2016 reported that only 5.7% of Principals had joined a CoL which had appointed a lead principal and had achievement challenge(s) approved,

16% of Principals were waiting to have lead Principals and/or challenges approved,

11.77% had no intention of joining or forming a CoL.

Through my contacts in Queensland where I have worked with colleagues on “shadowing” and my attendance at and work with the Queensland Association of State School Principals (QPSSA) I contacted several schools that were part of clusters. The Queensland Association of State School Principals has been involved in an Empowering local schools initiative. All states were granted funds and co-ordinated into clusters of schools. Co-ordinated is a loose term to describe the involvement of some schools. They are three years into the initiative.

Summary of Visits

School A

180 pupils mid-band school. This school has one “Master Teacher’ based at the school and works only at School A. The Master teacher position was created in 300 schools. Generally they only teach at the one school in a coaching and mentor role working on literacy at year one and four. Area to work on decided by the AIP (Annual Implementation Plan) using results from NAPLAN (National Assessment Programme-Literacy and Numeracy) The AIP is decided in conjunction with the PEAAC (Principal Education Advisor Australian Curriculum). AIP uses the NAPLAN data and School A has an assessment plan using Probe, Running records, PAT etc. Master teacher has a budget, a website and a network. All teachers in Australia are ranked and appointments take personality tests into account. The Master teacher runs coaching and mentoring sessions, staff meetings and one to one interventions with teachers. They are fulltime and do not have a class or do duty. The positions are for three years and it has not yet been decided if they will roll over. This Principal was on secondment from a neighbouring school and worked closely with that school. Well respected leader of local small cluster. Used data well to access PLD for his staff.

School B

1000 pupils. Lead school for district. COL because they believe in it. These schools all have a curriculum leader (released) and are released for Music/PE some geography and history. Very charismatic Principal leader with credibility and experience in leading the cluster schools around him. Well supported by the education director for the district. Knowledgeable about what is required in the state system to access PLD for teachers. Facility within this school to enable teacher and Principal PLD. PLD based on perceived need in curriculum areas rather than data.

School C

400 pupils. Low socio economic school. Ad hoc sharing of teacher expertise. Keen to be involved but nothing organised. Will join with other school occasionally. Principals of

schools in the district do get together informally led by experienced Principal but little PLD. New Principal at this school under guidance from senior Principal and relying on expertise within the school and mentor.

School D

Inner city suburb. Faith school with PLD as part of the faith component. Not too much else unless initiated by the Principal. Principal relies on advice from state directors as to what is required.

School E

Outer city suburb. Cluster for Principal activities (sports, awards, meetings, culture) Excellent sharing of expertise by and within Principal cluster but reactive rather than proactive and not based on data they collect but more on PEAAC.

Queensland Association of State School Principals Conference report

The conference was a highlight of my sabbatical and enabled me to further establish contacts to follow up and undertake research into the impact of communities of learners. I attended the conference with a fellow Otago Principal. We were personally welcomed to the 50th conference.

Keynote speakers included the following:

Dr Sue Langley

Positive climate requires positive emotions

70% of employees perceive their climate is traced to the action of the leader

Rabia Siddique

Lawyer, activist, Muslim immigrant living in Perth as a child. Grew to be a negotiator for English army during various conflicts. Kidnapped, rescued and took English defence ministry to court for not receiving recognition for service.

Spoke of her immigrant child upbringing. Sexually abused as a child.

An intelligent and passionate story about achieving and believing.

Top class presentation

Sohail Inayatullah. Futurist

What are we doing that we don't need to be doing anymore

Dr Simon Breakspear

The best kids do the best in tests they can read.

Referenced work to NAPLAN but acknowledged it not everything. Queensland have done well with raising students from low socio economic zones?

Sometimes no matter how much help you get you still can't succeed at some levels.

Time to stop looking for the new method. (This will never happen)

Dr Simon suggests change by small group work. Get some staff motivated and develop it well. Don't have too many diverse initiatives

If you can't say it clearly then you don't understand it yourself.

Director General Dr Tim Watterson opened on behalf of Minister

Data and more data. Expounding NAPLAN DATA

Australia are starting to develop relationships between schools to improve success. They aim to empower principals to develop their own strategies.

A great school has a great Principal
The 'School Improvement Unit' SIU gets all the data. Dr Tim is leading this
School improvement unit (QELI) developed to assist schools to develop in professional
delivery and improve data that goes to SIU.

Conclusion

“It is all about the people and the relationships.” All the funding and the resources you could want will not enhance achievement unless the people involved want to be involved. Time and time again I saw motivated people wanting to learn, to focus on what is needed and trust others to help them. I also saw that where relationships were strained, where coercive plans and policies were implemented it just did not click.

There's a direct correlation between communities that form a community of learning and a high interest in PLD. Such a community is continually challenging itself to be involved in diverse aspects of leadership or curriculum or assessment or trends in education.

Within Communities that were working together or those that were starting to work together the following was evident

- There is strong leadership in the district in schools and early childhood centres
- Personalised learning is a strength within schools
- Student agency is strong. Children are aware of what they are learning.
- Learning environments are planned, exciting and best practise
- Mixed ability grouping is common.
- ECE centres are 100% positive about transition at their level and want to work with the sector to enhance the understandings and teacher pedagogy that will assist the students. It is not about the 'content' of transition. It is about inquiring into our collective teaching. This came through time and time again. There is a real coherence between the centres.
- Taha maori is very evident. (New Zealand context)
- Teachers and Principals work very hard to develop the competency of risk taking. I saw this many times.
- Industrial matters are an issue but it does not holding communities back.
- Schools were evaluative of what they were doing.
- The 'mechanics' of communities were understood eg AST and WST
- Transition at the secondary level was eagerly sought by all sectors. There was a willingness to work together as witnessed at ECE level.
- Principals are focused and acknowledge that education is a changing landscape

Why are schools and principals not joining the IES model?

There are many different models of collaboration from the coercive models where collaboration is enforced to voluntary collaboration over time. All models require social capital and trust to some degree to succeed long term.

From my discussions with principals and references the following points, real or imagined, were presented time and time again in the New Zealand situation:

- Loss of self Management
- Unknown variable of staffing and funding
- Inability to identify the cluster of schools. Pathways and transition points not clear
- Concept of collaboration not readily understood
- Pressure of sustaining current initiatives
- Did not trust the process

As Dr Simon Breakspear said change is hard and sometimes it is instant eg fashion or technology. We need to focus on the change that makes the difference to Children. We need to be aware that halfway through a three year change process people have lost the belief that it will work. As I write this report I am conscious that the government has changed and strategies and initiatives will change.

The big River Cluster has a vision which has been used to drive the achievement challenge and the PLD programme. It is a paradox that the people undertaking the PLD may not have been party to the original vision.

A CoL by its very nature will have a flexible, variable membership as members move jobs and schools but the PLD and achievement challenge will take a minimum of two years to get through in the start up phase.

It is a paradox that the funding provider for a community of schools wishing to drive their PLD keeps such a tight centralised control on the direction and use of funds. There is limited funding for a large school for seminar requirements and CoLs don't get to discuss contractual obligations with proverbs. "We trust you but not that much!"

It is a paradox that the board have signed a memorandum of understanding promising high levels of trust and respect, co-operation, sharing, working together with professional development as a key focus and yet some principals struggle with being part of the group.

References

Shadowing

Peer Assistance for Principals: benefits and issues Laurie Brady

Laurie Brady (1995) Peer Assistance for Principals: benefits and issues, *British Journal of In-Service Education*, 21:1, 69-79, DOI: 10.1080/0305763950210107 To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305763950210107>

Will Marshall 2012 Australian states impose Gillard's 'Empowering Local Schools' programme.

Ministry of Education resources Guide for Schools and Kura 2016