

Sabbatical Report
For
Wendy Gabriel
2018

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Acknowledgements | Page 3 |
| Focus Question | Page 3 |
| Preamble | Page 3 |
| Introduction | Page 3 |
| Background reading and professional documents | Page 4 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cry the Wounded Land by Mark Galloway• Ka Hikitia• Tu Rangatira• Hautu: Maori Cultural Responsiveness Self Review Tool• Te Mana Korero: Relationships for Learning• Culture Speaks• Culture Counts• Growth Mindset: Carol Dweck• Tataiako: Cultural Competencies | |
| Undertake an inquiry | Page 4 |
| My Findings | Pages 4 - 7 |

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Focus Question

- To investigate how Maori Culture aligns with the Christian Culture of our school.
- To develop cultural knowledge and responsiveness.

Preamble

My sabbatical objectives were to:

1. Engage and reflect with professional readings and leadership materials.
2. Undertake an inquiry into how Maori Culture aligns with our school's Christian Culture.
3. To find out the HOW?
4. Recharge, reflect and re-energise

Introduction

My name is Wendy Gabriel and I am the Tumuaki at Sonrise Christian School in Gisborne. This is my 20th year at the school and in New Zealand. I am originally from Cape Town, in South Africa and have been teaching for 39 years.

I have chosen this topic for my research as there is often a clash within our school when it comes to a Maori worldview and our Christian worldview. We have more than 50% Maori students in our school and we want to uphold the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi but at the same time ensure that our Christian worldview is at the centre of everything that we do. The majority of our Maori families are Christians so want the best of the Maori culture without compromising the Christian culture. We also want to be confident in who we are in Christ while at the same time being Maori.

The Treaty of Waitangi principles puts students at the centre of teaching and learning, asserting that they should experience a curriculum that engages and challenges them, is forward-looking and inclusive, and affirms NZ's unique identity. I want to investigate and see how our school can better uphold and implement the principles of the Treaty ie Partnership, Participation and Protection.

Background Readings

Part of my research began with reading the book “Cry the Wounded Land” by Mark Holloway. The book is about the author having a conversation with God on Maori culture.

Undertaking my inquiry

Learning: Focus Question 1

During the learning phase I took time to visit and speak with the Head of Maori and the Principal of Excellera College. My intention was to see how other Christian schools were aligning Maori worldview with the Christian worldview.

Questions I am looking to have answers to:

1. How are the 3 principles ie partnership, participation and protection reflected in the school; classrooms?
2. What are your plans and strategies to support and promote Maori learners’ success?
3. How do you develop a sense of safety; a sense of belonging in cultural identity?
4. How do you go about your marae visits? Is it compulsory for all students to attend? Is it only the Maori students who attend? What happens if a teacher refuses to attend a marae visit? What is your purpose for the marae visit?
5. How has the school brought about changes in teacher knowledge, attitude and practice with regards to tikanga and te reo?
6. How have you engaged with your Maori whanau? What is your whanau involvement and support like?
7. What does Maori success look like at Excellera College?

My Findings

1. Principles of the Treaty

Partnership

- Working together with iwi, hapu, whanau and Maori communities to develop strategies for Maori education.
- Teacher attended weekly waiata sessions at the marae to strengthen her knowledge; connecting with the Wananga.
- At this point in time there are no Maori representation on the Board of Trustees.
- Having genuine relationships with their Maori community.

Protection

- Te Reo is a taonga to be protected and an official language of NZ.
- Continually upskilling the staff in their Te Reo ability.

- Actively protecting Maori knowledge, interests, values and other taonga - a commitment to knowing, respecting and valuing where students are, where they come from and building on what they bring with them.
- Normalising Te Reo.
- Including tikanga school-wide.
- Adding a Maori perspective to topics and inquiry provides an opportunity to weave tikanga and Maori view into everyday situations.

Participation

- Working to strengthen home-school relationships.
- No Maori representation on the Board at this stage.
- Maori whanau support group encouraged to participate in school decision making.
- Equity for Maori.

2. Plans and Strategies to promote Maori learners' success

- Ongoing PD with Cognition.
- Providing leadership opportunities.
- Greater buy-in from whanau.
- Review and re-shaping educational mindsets.

3. Developing a sense of safety; belonging

- Parent involvement
- Partnership
- Consultation
- Parents were invited to attend the dinner at a marae visit.
- Students showcased what they learnt at the marae.
- Parents loved the fact that they could attend the dinner at the marae.
- They were keen to attend the marae invitation but not keen on attending parent meetings.
- Making connections with local expertise.
- Started a Maori whanau support group to strengthen the partnership.
- Consultation for the strategic planning of the school. Aspirations of Maori for their children.
- Whanau is becoming more connected to their school.
- The purpose of the Maori support group was to set goals and to action it. This has been slow.

4. Marae Visits

In the first year the teacher started on Te Reo first, then a noho marae experience followed. It started off with a year 10 class only as they did Te Reo as a subject. The purpose was to experience a marae stay; it was optional and not only for Maori students. It took a year to convince her board and other staff members. Teacher wrote a proposal to the board and the principal supported this proposal. She connected with a school that had a strong Maori worldview and commitment. The host school invited them as their guests to a marae. This was the start. As they ventured further, the teacher had access to a local marae which had some aspects of the Christian faith. The following year the teacher started the kapa haka group. The teacher (who is not Maori) learnt alongside with the students. Lessons are implemented via the visual network for learning. The local marae has a Catholic connection

and it was an awesome historical as well as a Maori experience for the students. They got the opportunity to visit the museum to learn more about the Catholic connection.

Games were introduced while at the marae.

This year the school was in a position to employ a kapa haka tutor for 1 hour once per week. The school had budgeted to make this happen and to show their commitment to further develop Maori culture and identity in the school. The teacher had to show that she was sincere and committed to upholding the principles of the Treaty of participation, partnership and protection. The purpose of the marae visits is to strengthen identity, cultural responses, language. At this stage of their journey only students who do kapa haka and Te Reo attend the marae visits. It makes their kapa haka and Te Reo relevant and authentic.

5. Changes in attitude, teacher knowledge and practice

- By being committed; persistent; being visible so that it becomes normal practice.
- Was not too concerned about some teachers' attitudes toward the culture, the focus was on the students. It is the right thing to do.
- Digging deeper into achievement data.
- Eliminating deficit thinking.
- Linking to the whanau conversation.
- Creating a non-threatening space; to be honest and sincere.
- Tino Rangiteratanga (self-determination); don't sugar-coat it.
- By being respectful with how you interact and present to others.
- Inviting whanau to school assemblies and staying for a cuppa to have a chat. The principal used this opportunity to consult on the strategic direction of the school.

6. How have you engaged with your Maori whanau?

- Personal invitations.
- Calling them.
- Started a whanau support group.
- If their children are involved in school events, they are more likely to attend. At this stage attendance is around 60%.

7. Maori achieving success at Excellera Christian College

- Creating opportunities
- Students involved
- To be better than we were before - setting goals and moving forward.
- Good attendance
- Ongoing PD for all staff with Cognition - **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**
- To reduce disparity
- Equity for all
- Success rate has gone up - discursive practice across the school. In 2017 Maori students had gone from 69% to 74% in Reading; 69% to 85% in Writing; and Maths dropped back from 73% to 63% in national standards.
- To have high expectations for all students.
- Changing learning and teaching styles .

Focus Question 2: To develop cultural knowledge and responsiveness

During my twenty years at Sunrise Christian School I have seen changes to our school's ethnic makeup and a growing awareness that we need to consider our beliefs and practices around effective cultural responsiveness. For the last few years we have had more than 50% of our students classified as Maori. Increasing numbers of Maori families are choosing our school.

As a staff we have started to develop strategies to strengthen our practices.

- Maori teacher was given a management unit to oversee and strengthen our practices.
- We have invited guest speakers to help with tikanga and for the staff to get understanding that tikanga is not to be feared but to be embraced.
- We have reviewed Tataiako and Ka Hikitea documents and adapted some practices (but we need to do this again).
- We have employed a kapa haka tutor to train our students. This is extremely well attended not only by our Maori students but also by our non-Maori students.
- We have visited our local marae but need to build on this. At this stage the marae is unavailable due to repairs being undertaken.

Learning: My Findings

- We need to have high expectations for all our students. This is a crucial precursor for high achievement. Deficit thinking must be challenged. Do not accept mediocre achievement. Continue to ask the hard questions; what is good practice? Read up on ERO's reports.
- As leaders we need to ask of ourselves if this is good enough. Challenge our own thinking and mindsets.
- Teachers must be supported to develop cultural responsiveness.
- Work on authentic relationships with our community, especially our Maori community. Have honest dialogue with our whanau.

Taking Action in 2019

This will be the work that begins in 2019. This thinking and new learning will inform the strategic plan. Key improvement strategies will be further developed such as:

- Find out about the aspirations of Maori students and their whanau.
- Identify their strengths, needs and next steps.
- Develop teaching strategies that improve Maori outcomes - equity and equality
- Actively and repeatedly acknowledge the inherent potential and capability of Maori students.
- Lead with moral purpose focused on a commitment to every child achieving to their potential.
- Celebrate success, especially learning success.
- Ensure that Te Reo is visible in the school - what is seen, heard and felt.
- etc

Recharge, Reflect and Re-energise

The intent of a sabbatical is to provide some downtime from the daily demands of principalship. I was extremely grateful to have had the opportunity. I was able to spend time with family and friends and was able to feel generally more relaxed.

The break also allowed me the opportunity to reflect on the changing nature of principalship. Initiatives such as Communities of Learning, Special Education restructuring, targeted funding priorities, health & safety requirements, social media and increased accountabilities of boards have meant that it is harder for principals to focus on what really matters ie to be the leader of learning.

Wendy Gabriel

PRINCIPAL

Sonrise Christian School

