

**Margaret Duynhoven**

## **Primary Principals' Sabbatical Inquiry: Term 2, 2019**

### **Focus of my Sabbatical**

To investigate successful 'arts' practices that celebrate cultural diversity, increase student engagement, and benefit achievement of Māori and Filipino learners.

### **About the author**

I became Principal at St Joseph's Primary School in 2013. St Joseph's is situated in the small but vibrant coastal community of Opunake, Taranaki. Our school has students from diverse cultures, with a significant number coming from the Philippines as well as Sri Lanka, India and the Pacific Islands. I am passionate about the 'arts' and how students need to be given regular opportunities to express themselves, their lives and their environment through visual arts, dance, drama, and music.

### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I would like to acknowledge the St Joseph's School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and granting me leave to take this term to engage in a balance of professional learning, reflection and rejuvenation.

I would especially like to acknowledge and thank my amazing Deputy Principal, Brook Murfitt for his willingness to take on the role and responsibilities of principal in my absence as well as to the capable staff of St Joseph's, which continued to keep teaching and learning the focus for the school in during my Sabbatical.

Special thanks to Bruce Hammonds, my first Principal and unofficial mentor who encouraged me as a first year teacher to develop my own creative teaching style and fostered my inclusion of the 'arts' in all aspects of teaching and learning. His passion and enthusiasm inspired me to ensure that every child's creativity was nurtured and valued in my classroom practice. As a principal I have been determined to ensure that the 'arts' are not just taught, but valued as a means to enrich the development and learning of all students.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank TeachNZ, NZEI and The Ministry of Education who make these Sabbatical opportunities available to principals. It is a fantastic opportunity for principals to be able to take a step back from leadership roles and engage in alternative activities and recharge.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of my sabbatical was to investigate how the 'arts' can be regularly implemented within classroom practice to promote cultural identity, increase student self esteem and student engagement, as a means to promote learning and increase achievement for our school's Māori and Filipino students.

## **Executive Summary**

It is my thinking that learning is most effective when it's made personal and the best way to do this is through successful 'arts' practices. The impact of National Standards cannot be underestimated. The curriculum was narrowed and the 'arts' were pushed aside to the point that they were not seen as being relevant to teach. I truly believe that the 'arts' should have greater emphasis within a school's curriculum. By participating in the arts, students' personal well-being is enhanced and confidence to take risks is increased through the expression and interpretation of ideas within creative, aesthetic and technological frameworks.

## **Methodology**

Through this sabbatical I have been doing a lot of reading on this topic and have meet with fellow Principals to discuss how the 'arts' are implemented as a way to increase student engagement and achievement. During my sabbatical I spent time creating google slides around the teaching of specific visual art themes for all ākonga as well as reviewing the St Joseph's current school 'arts' curriculum document. Through observing how teachers integrate the 'arts' within their classroom practice I have been able to evaluate the effectiveness of these opportunities on enhancing the learning experiences of all ākonga, in particular, our Māori and Filipino students.

## **Findings**

St Joseph's recognizes the importance of New Zealand's cultural diversity and the unique position of Māori and Filipino cultures within our school. One of our Charism Statements is to *"Respect different cultures, ancestral traditions and artistic expressions, both within Aotearoa and globally."* The aim of our school's Arts Curriculum Plan is that *"Students will learn to explore, challenge, affirm and celebrate unique artistic expressions of self, community and culture by learning in, through and about the arts"* By implementing a variety of 'arts' into classroom practice teachers have been able to provide students with powerful learning experiences and vibrant learning environments. Staff take into consideration the prior knowledge, experiences, cultural background, and interests of the students, as well as ensuring that aspects of the 'arts' curriculum are covered in a meaningful way.

## **Conclusion and Implications for St Joseph's**

The arts, (whether it's visual, musical, drama or dance), play an important role in education now more than ever as they help create the individual learner. Education through the 'arts' needs to be moved to the centre of education and not just sit out on the periphery and it is evident that leadership plays a vital role in developing effective 'arts' practices within a school to ensure that this happens.

As Principals have the most influence over our schools, the best way to support the teaching and learning around the 'arts' is through having a shared school vision and strong leadership system. Since my Sabbatical, I'm now in a stronger position to support our school to provide ākonga with quality teaching experiences within the 'arts' curriculum.

The 'arts' hold an important place in St Joseph's. As a school we offer weekly schoolwide Kapa haka and festival performances. We provide weekly guitar, ukulele, piano, and singing lessons with an itinerant tutor. Every second year we perform a whole school production incorporating Drama, Music, Dance where students experience staging, lighting, make-up, learning scripts, movement, dance and singing. Our School Choir performs at the Friendship Club and supports the Catholic Church when running the Masses at the local rest home.

The whole school takes part in weekly singing practice where we learn songs for school masses, and other songs just for fun. Students have the opportunity to enter in the Taranaki Wearable arts competition and enjoy working with soft materials, they also have to learn how to model their pieces in a stage performance.

Senior students take part in poster competitions and observational drawing competitions as a part of the Taranaki Science Fair. They can also enter both 2D and 3D pieces of visual art in the Taranaki Maths Fair along with computer generated art forms.

Our students experience drama through role plays and acting out scripture passages in the Religious Education programme and perform plays as a part of their literacy programme. The whole school also takes part in both Easter and Christmas plays which are presented at a school liturgy. Our school prides itself on the quality of visual arts that we produce. Our walls are alive with colour and vibrant pieces of art that the students have created.

Through regular and planned implementation of 'arts' within classroom practice our school has promoted cultural identity, increased student self esteem and student engagement as well as increasing achievement for all ākonga, in particular Māori and Filipino students. This is clearly evident in our End of Year data.

Our school has increased the learning experiences of all ākonga by providing a variety of visual and performing arts opportunities. Since implementing schoolwide kapa haka, there has been a significant increase with student engagement in all areas of the curriculum. By affirming and validating all cultures we have continued to build stronger foundations for learning and teaching. There is a shared understanding of equity and diversity and how the 'arts' can be used to celebrate the diverse cultures within our school community.

I have worked alongside teachers to implement culturally responsive arts practices that build Māori and Filipino achievement success, where cultural diversity is celebrated and all programmes ensure equitable opportunities for all. During my sabbatical I have created google slides to support both teachers and students in the area of visual arts. This was an easy way to integrate Digital technology and as a staff we have noticed that the use of creativity and problem solving skills increased and these skills were transferred into other curriculum learning areas.

After reviewing our school's curriculum there has been greater emphasis placed on promoting student voice, student engagement and raising self esteem of students in specific ethnic groups. This review also increased staff pedagogy around how the 'arts' can be integrated into all curriculum areas rather than as a stand-alone subject- thus creating a more authentic, problem solving and creative environment. As a school we need to embrace creativity as part of learning and to start thinking about creativity as a skill. I believe that by having greater access to the 'arts' curriculum, our students will be able to experience greater engagement through improved collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking.

Staff feel more confident in their delivery of the 'arts' and have a higher understanding of how integrating the 'arts' into all curriculum areas are beneficial for our students' learning journey. There has definitely been a shift away from passive to active learners with increased motivation, inspiration and learning satisfaction. As a staff we will continue to ensure that the 'arts' are regularly utilised to help create powerful learning experiences and vibrant learning environments for our students.

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