

PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL REPORT

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Inquiry Learning:

How is it being implemented in schools that cater for the 'middle years', (students 12 – 14 years) in New Zealand and parts of Australia?

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A. PURPOSE

‘Thinking’ is one of the Key Competencies in The New Zealand Curriculum. From my perspective this means that Thinking Skills & Inquiry Learning should be part of the learning that takes place in New Zealand schools. This ‘new’ curriculum implies that thinking skills programmes and approaches are an effective way to improve teaching and learning, and their use in schools should be encouraged.

Professor John Hattie, of Auckland University, has completed a comprehensive research paper on what actually works in the classroom, to impact on student learning. The conclusion from his work states that the teaching of thinking and inquiry learning is one of the areas with the largest impact on student learning.

There have been a number of research papers related to this topic, eg. Hattie, EPPI (London), Ritchie (regarding the effect on Aboriginal children), Bloom, Fullan, Hargraves, all stating the need to teaching ‘thinking’ in the classroom.

Most of us believe that it should be taught, but I wanted to see:

1. How it was being implemented in schools who teach students 12 – 14 years.
2. What was actually happening in the classrooms.
3. Was there communication with the contributing primary schools as to what was being taught in this area in their schools.
4. Was there one ‘model’ that best suited students’ 12 – 14 years.
5. How would my findings benefit the students at Wesley Intermediate School.

B. BACKGROUND

In 1988 Art Costa wrote a paper entitled “Transforming Education”. He stated that, *“The claim is often made that schools give a disproportionate emphasis to logical/mathematical and verbal material and intelligence. My sense is that this is only superficially true. The content may have this character, and lip service may be given to these forms of intelligence, but the actual educational process remains focused on low level skills. The real development of thinking skills, even within these areas of intelligence, is usually neglected as the rest of our mental capacities.”*

We have seen a lot of change happening in schools since then, and there has been plenty of research papers published stating that the teaching of ‘thinking’ should be happening in classrooms around the world.

Our own Professor John Hattie from Auckland University has done extensive research on what actually works to improve student learning in the classroom, and his results show that the teaching of ‘thinking’ is hugely important.

Research papers coming out of Newcastle University state, *“It is evident that teaching Thinking Skills can be very effective in raising attainment. It excites some teachers, most pupils are enthusiastic, especially when it is taught well and it can transform classrooms and outcomes.”*

Research on ‘thinking’ was also conducted by the EPPI Centre in London as they have also introduced ‘thinking’ into the English Curriculum. Results from their research show that, *“when thinking programmes and approaches are used in schools, they are effective in improving pupils’ performance on a range of tested outcomes (relative to those who did not receive thinking skills interventions). The magnitude of the gains found appears to be important when compared with the reported effect sizes of other educational interventions.”*

When you look at the findings of the research material, there is an overriding emphasis on the fact that if you want to see students improve their learning, the teaching of ‘thinking’ is paramount. At Wesley Intermediate School, we had often held discussions relating to the teaching of ‘thinking’ and how it could be implemented into our classrooms in a meaningful and easy manner. We were well aware that by 2010, the ‘new’ New Zealand Curriculum should be in place in all schools. One area that our school needed to improve was the implementation of ‘thinking & inquiry learning’.

In 2007 we joined an ICT Cluster, with one of our main goals being to implement thinking and inquiry into our schools. One of our main contributing schools had started implementing this in 2006, and I was intrigued with the teaching and learning that was happening in their school. Early in 2007 and 2008, I attended the Learning@Schools Conferences in Rotorua and had the opportunity to see what other schools were doing in this area. By 2008, our school was grappling

with the implementation of 'thinking' into our classroom programme. During the same year our ICT Cluster had a Teacher Only Day with Michael Pohl as our lead speaker. During his sessions he mentioned the good work happening in the Johnsonville Schools in Wellington, and the Waverly Schools in Melbourne. It was at that time that I decided that I would apply for a Sabbatical and go and visit some of these schools, as well as investigate what was happening in Intermediate Schools in Auckland.

In September 2008, our ICT Cluster sent some teachers to the U-Learn Conference in Christchurch, with a number of our teachers attending the Inquiry session presented by Weymouth Intermediate School. They have built their Inquiry Model around the acronym, 'Success'. Our teachers came back 'buzzing' as they felt that the model was easy to understand and easy to implement. Since then our staff have also seen the amazing work happening at Waikowhai Primary School, and we have adapted the two models to implement our own Inquiry Model at our school.

My actual Sabbatical was to be spent looking at other schools in New Zealand and Australia and see what other models of good inquiry were happening in schools catering for 12 – 14 year old students.

C. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN (Methodology)

1. Compile a simple questionnaire for schools to complete. N.B. Due to the fact that principals get so many requests to complete questionnaires via email, this one was to be 4 – 5 questions, and would only take a few seconds to complete.
2. Use feedback from the questionnaires, ideas on different schools' websites, plus feedback from other 'professionals' to find out the most appropriate schools to visit.
3. Visit schools and observe what was actually happening in the classrooms.
4. Use information collected from visits and conferences to put together a model of 'thinking & inquiry' for the staff in my school to use.

D. QUESTIONNAIRE (sent out to Intermediate Schools)

1. Do you know if your contributing schools teach Inquiry Learning?
2. Does your Intermediate School teach Inquiry Learning?

3. If yes, is there a particular model you use?
4. If yes, would you allow me time to visit your school?

E. QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Fifteen e-mails were sent out to Intermediate schools in Auckland, with thirteen responding.

1. Do you know if your contributing schools teach Inquiry Learning?
All thirteen answered Yes
2. Does your Intermediate School teach Inquiry Learning?
All thirteen answered Yes
3. If yes, is there a particular model you use?
A different range of answers
 - ILIT model based on Information Literacy
 - Use thinking tools
 - Model comes from Infolink
 - Model influenced by Yoram Harpaz & Adam Lefstein (Israel)
 - Problem Based Learning
 - Solo Taxonomy
 - Other schools mentioned using a range of thinking skills
4. If yes, would you allow me time to visit your school?
I am pleased to state that every school stated that they would be keen to have me visit their particular school.

F. QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS (Findings)

Obviously there was a lot happening in the Primary and Intermediate Schools in regard to Inquiry & Thinking. Like our school, all the Intermediate schools that responded were aware that 'thinking & inquiry' was happening in their contributing schools. All the Intermediate schools who responded to the questionnaire were also implementing some form of thinking & inquiry in their schools... however there was quite a range of different models being used.

Using the information collected, I then arranged to visit a number of these schools, plus other schools in New Zealand and Australia.

G. CONCLUSIONS – WHAT WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED

My original goal for this study was to see how inquiry learning was being implemented in schools that cater to students in the ‘middle years’ of their education. The quick answer to this is that there are a whole range of ways in which schools are doing this.

Throughout the study I was seeking ideas on how to implement Inquiry Learning at Wesley Intermediate School in Auckland. We are a Decile One school with 80% of our students being Samoan or Tongan.

I would like to share with you the final plan that is currently being implemented in our school, and would like to acknowledge Weymouth Intermediate School and Waikowhai Primary School, as these two schools ideas had a large bearing on our current model. I need to say that all the other models that I saw were well planned and well thought out, however the two schools mentioned above had aspects to their Inquiry Models that best suited our students.

The model we have adapted is based around the SUCCESS model at Weymouth. Each letter stands for a different part of the inquiry process. Each separate letter is also ‘colour coded’, which is the idea we saw at Waikowhai.

“S” stands for... Set the scene

“U” stands for... Uncover the question

“C” stands for... Collect resources

“C” stands for... Collate and Record

“E” stands for... Edit and examine

“S” stands for... Share and present

“S” stands for... Self reflect and celebrate

Teachers and students work their way through each area mentioned above when working on their inquiry topic. If you would like to know more, and see our schools colourful Powerpoint which has been presented at the 2009 ULearn Conference, go to the ULearn Website and search, “The Wesley Way” or you can visit our ICT Cluster wiki, by going to “ngataonga.wikispaces.com”. This Powerpoint gives a history of our school’s journey and shows how we are implementing specific thinking skills into different areas

H. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I must acknowledge and thank the staff at my own school, Wesley Intermediate School, in particular the Acting Principal, Mrs Heather Collins, and the Acting Deputy Principal, Mr Jamie Aitken, who carried additional responsibilities during my absence.

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