Sabbatical report of Jeff Freeman, Knighton Normal School, Hamilton, January 2011.

IMPROVING TEACHER PERFORMANCE
- a bigger stick or a carrot?

Introduction/ Explanatory notes

I was awarded my sabbatical in 2009 but as a result of two lots of surgery I delayed it until 2010.

I was unable, because of school complications, (ERO, Deputy principal leaving at short notice) to take a complete term off in 2010 so I took my leave over terms 3 and 4.

I also, because of personal circumstances and school priorities, changed my focus from "How different ethnic groups are included in large schools - how their cultures are celebrated." to Improving Teacher performance.

Acknowledgements;

I would like to thank the Ministry of Education for granting me the sabbatical leave and then for agreeing to me deferring it for a year

I would also like to thank the Knighton Normal School Board of Trustees for supporting me with this leave. I would like to thank my two Deputies for stepping up so capably and the rest of the staff for supporting them and me.

I was fortunate to visit some very good schools during my time off and had many interesting and challenging conversations with principal colleagues and their senior management teams. I appreciate them giving up their time to work with me.

I have been influenced quite significantly by the work of Jan Robertson, formerly of the Leadership Centre at Waikato University and Vivianne Robinson from Auckland University with their work on mentoring and difficult conversations. Their work is readily available so I have not listed any specifics but refer to it where it is relevant to my discussion.

I also have enjoyed Kevin Knight's work and his dimensions of teaching. We have talked about a lot of his ideas at Knighton. Once again his work is readily available.

Finally I enjoyed reading Juliet Small's sabbatical report on Learning Walks. Unfortunately I had finished my sabbatical and written my report before I discovered her report. A lot of schools use variations on the Four minute walk and Juliet provides a good discussion as to the merits of different approaches.

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Rationale

My rationale for changing my focus was a quote I had on my classroom wall years ago when I was a classroom teacher. "You don't need to be sick to get better". In my early days at Knighton I used to refer to this and it became a common saying in our school and although it is not used quite so much now it is embedded in our school culture. I believe very strongly that we all want to get, or do things better, and that as school leaders we need to set up systems that help people do this.

I also carry out the appraisal of all my staff – teachers, learning assistants (teacher aides) and support staff. We review and refine this process each year and it is discussed with, and agreed to, by staff. This last point is a really important one. They know what we are looking at and why were doing so. A key component is that it will suggested / directed that teachers get together to talk about teaching and learning programmes and to provide support for one another.

I feel I need to explain my title as it is very much tongue in cheek. Early in my sabbatical I was playing golf with a principal colleague, who was also on sabbatical leave. We were playing with a mate of his and he asked me what I was looking at – I told him that it was Improving Teacher performance . His answer was "well that is easy – use a bigger stick".

I was tempted to make this my entire report as there are people out there, including a lot of politicians, who feel that it is that simple.

My report is an amalgam of the things I discussed and saw with my colleagues which in a lot of cases confirmed what we currently do at Knighton. Most schools I visited are doing all or some of the things I am going to mention.

There was general agreement about many things. The culture of the school is absolutely vital. To improve teacher performance the following things must be in place:

- there must be a school culture with a shared vision with buy in from all stakeholders.

- this vision includes agreed beliefs, a learning culture where teachers and management know the children really well and want to improve their achievement in all areas.

- the appraisal process is an important, but small part, of the process.

- there are agreed levels of expectations re performance by the staff.

- teachers and children talk about teaching and learning.

- classrooms need to be visited regularly.

I will, in my report, deal with each of these statements in some depth, but will not provide specifics examples. I am happy to share copies of things I talk about with people who approach me. Some are Knighton's and other examples belong to colleagues and I would need to get their permission

Two quotes, that go along with my earlier one about not being sick to get better are important. I heard them from the Rector of Palmerston North Boys High School who spoke at our Normal Schools conference in 2010. I am not sure of their source but I enjoyed them and they are most relevant re my comments re school culture

He said " Lick the lollypop of mediocrity once and you will suck it for ever" and "If you don't stand for something you will fall for everything". The schools I visited all had high expectations, of and for staff, and for children and they all had sets of

beliefs that permeated the whole school culture – none were what could be called "liquorish allsorts schools" that try every new fad and idea that is floated. All schools visited had a clear philosophy that all decisions re teaching and learning were based upon.

In all the schools I visited teachers were regularly observed teaching by the principal, senior leadership teams and in some cases by peers. These visits were welcomed by teachers because they led to professional dialogue, sharing of ideas and improved achievement for children.

Shared beliefs
'   All the schools I visited had clear expectations as to the achievement levels that they wanted for their children. These were well documented and reported on to the school community, BoTs and MoE. Systems were in place to identify children not achieving and teachers had to explain what they were doing to rectify the situation. (I will revisit this later in my report)

Most schools had vigorous performance management systems in place and as mentioned teachers were observed teaching regularly. What was significant here was that observations were quite focused and teachers knew what was being looked at. Once again there were clear expectations of and for teachers. These expectations were set out in a variety of ways and had been negotiated with and agreed to by staff.

i.   Re Professional standards and job descriptions - clear indicators as to what was expected performance or best practice had been negotiated with and agreed to by and with staff and was well documented.

ii.   Some schools had developed detailed statements as to what could be expected to be seen in a Literacy or Maths programme in that school. Once again the had been negotiated and agreed buy in by staff. (I include an example below)

iii.   When teachers were being visited and observed in formal situations the teachers were well aware as to what specifically was being observed and feedback was given to both celebrate good performance but also to suggest ways of improvement. It was often suggested / directed that teachers talk to other staff members re their programmes. Staff saw this as being most positive.

iv.   The focus of peer observations were also negotiated and staff were given training in providing critical feedback. Staff were encouraged to be critical friends – not friendly critters!

The value of having these negotiated expectations or indicators made potentially difficult conversations much easier as the observer could say things like "I expected to see … but have I missed something?" or I thought we had agreed that ….. would happen but I am not seeing it.

A lot of schools provided training for senior staff in difficult conversations. The work of Jan Robertson and Vivianne Robinson is invaluable here. It is important that leadership teams role play or practice these conversations before working with staff as it needs real skill and preparation.

Learning conversations

Evidence from my visits to schools would suggest that this is one of the most successful ways of improving teacher performance. The work of Jan Robertson and Vivianne Robinson once again is invaluable here. In the schools I visited teachers were encouraged to talk about teaching and learning and reflect on their programmes. The achievement of children and how to move children is a key component of these discussions.. Staff in most schools were given some guidelines as to how peer review could work.

In most schools teachers were encouraged to reflect

Reflection involves:
- Looking to our experiences
- Connecting with our feelings
- Attending to theories in use
- Building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation as they unfold:
- Spending time exploring why we acted as we did
- Asking evaluative questions about our response and practice
- Writing down what happened
- Talking through what happened

Some useful questions for teachers and senior leadership teams to use are:

- What actions have you taken? Can you elaborate a bit?

* Tell me about

* What were you thinking about when you did ….

* Are the actions that you have taken working?

* How do you know?

• What leads you to believe that things are better / different / resolved?

• What evidence do you have?

• Is there any other way that you could interpret that?

• What has happened since? In what way (s) did that impact on….?

• What will you do next?

• What have you learned from this?

Knowing the children / teachers

Successful schools are that know their children and they have systems in place where teachers are asked to identify children who are not achieving and then have evidence as to what they are doing.

Possible Questions that could be asked of staff:

* Does your planning reflect the learning styles, needs, interests and abilities of all children in your class?

* Do you differentiate the learning tasks so that the diverse needs of the children are met and being catered for?

* Can students assess, track and set goals about their own learning?

* How well does the teacher set goals with students and how well can students identify their current goal?

* Are learning intentions evident?

* How do I gather and use data to support my planning decisions and my judgements about student progress and achievement?

* So how does this support the learning goals of …?

* What are you doing differently this year?

* You have a group of children that are not moving. What are you doing about this and how can we help you?

* How is evidence linked from planning to teaching in this classroom?

Class profiles:

Several schools have developed variations on what us oldtimers used to have to write - class descriptions.

These include a brief explanation of the teaching programme but the key component is that teachers are asked to identify children who are "at risk" academically, socially and emotionally. They are also asked to clearly identify just what they are going to do about these children. In a couple of cases Maori and Pasifika children were specifically targeted. A key aspect of these profiles are that the teacher sits down with the principal and other members of the Senior leadership team and they work their way through it Really knowing children and where they are is a key feature of successful schools.

Classroom visits

All the colleagues I visited agreed that regular visits to classrooms by principals and senior leadership teams were important. Staff very soon get used to them and feel supported. One approach worth considering is the:

Four minute walk through

I have mentioned earlier that a lot of schools do this and it is most effective. I have also referred to a colleague's sabbatical report. I believe that there is a place for both negotiated and unnegotiated foci for visits. If teachers and principals are trained in reflective or learning conversations only good things will emerge.

In conclusion I feel that most (all) teachers want to improve their own performance and the achievement of the children they care for. Clearly the bigger stick, despite my golfing buddy's opinion, is not the way to do it. In schools the only carrots we can

provide are support, guidance, positive school culture and agreement as to what the schools believes in re performance and achievement and a place where people are encouraged to talk about thinking and learning.

I am most appreciative of the chance to have had this sabbatical and returned to school challenged and refreshed and keen to roll up my sleeves again

I can be contacted on   jfreeman@kns.ac.nz if you would like copies of things I have mentioned or referred to.

Jeff Freeman

January 2011

Characteristics of a Knighton Numeracy Classroom

Environment	The Teacher	The Students
Classroom climate • reflects the cultural diversity of the class • all students are expected to engage in mathematical thinking and to contribute to the class learning community • reflects realistic mathematical expectations of all student which promote and value effort, persistence and concentration • risk-taking is encouraged • students' ideas are valued and they are safe to offer solutions and estimations • 'wrong' answers or misconceptions are used as learning opportunities • students expect to be challenged and justify their thinking • positive attitudes to mathematics are evident **Visual elements** • resources and equipment accessible and being used e.g. number lines, abacus, number charts, tables charts • evidence of children's learning dislayed. • modelling books and student work books • key vocabulary and visual support for mathematical ideas are displayed including Te Reo. • Learning intentions evident e.g. in modelling books, student books, task boards	**Interactions with content** • focuses on key mathematical ideas and shares these with students • identifies and records mathematical terms and vocabulary in planning • uses real life and appropriate tasks (socially appropriate and cognitively accessible) that reflect the cultural diversity of the class • structures purposeful and problematic tasks that enable different possibilities, strategies and ideas to emerge, and encourage debate • effectively uses of a range of equipment to model and support the development of mathematical thinking • makes connections to prior learning or related mathematical ideas • makes links to other mathematics strands and curriculum areas • effectively applies the Numeracy Project Teaching Model (material /imaging /number properties) • records key mathematical ideas in a variety of ways to support and extend thinking • challenges and scaffolds all students to solve difficult problems in a variety of ways • promotes the use of alternative and efficient methods to solve problems • provides opportunities for cognitive engagement and presses for understanding • uses ICT to support learning **Interaction with students** • provides opportunities for students to work with and learn from peers in flexible groupings • provides exposure to and explicit teaching of specific mathematical vocabulary. • allows students sufficient thinking time • listens to and build on students' ideas which develop and extend key concepts • promotes the sharing of ideas and strategies • supports students to explore and explain their mathematical ideas • encourages students to challenge ideas and justify strategies and solutions	**Interactions with content** • explore alternative strategies independently • pose questions for further exploration • understands and applies appropriate knowledge • engage in interesting and challenging activities • use number sense and estimation • express mathematical ideas confidently, both verbally and in written recording • use a range of equipment including ICT effectively to demonstrate and develop their mathematical thinking • record mathematical ideas using diagrams, symbols, and written statements • use the language of mathematics • reflect on and assess their own learning • know the purpose of what they are learning **Interactions with others** • work purposefully with peers and teachers to solve problems • contribute, justify and evaluate thinking • explore strategies and possible solutions • willing to challenge ideas and be

		challenged

Organisation
• Classroom organised to accommodate whole class, group teaching, independent work
• independent activities and learning aids, including appropriate computer programmes are accessible and appropriate to their needs
• whole class sessions and small group teaching evident
• provision of purposeful practice activities that link to prior and current learning
• Suggested lesson format
   - Warm-up e.g. knowledge, revision, vocab
   - Group work – based on need
   - Warm down e.g marking, recapping
 	
. student books set out as per KNS book expectations.file://localhost/Volumes/Teacher_Resources/Curriculum/KNS student book expectations
	• uses a range of question types to promote higher order thinking, and reflection on learning
	• encourages students to listen and evaluate others' mathematical thinking/ideas
	• provides constructive and timely feedback to promote learning
	• works with students to set and achieve realistic goals.
	
	Assessing learning
	• provides opportunities for students to reflect on learning
	• allows children to demonstrate their knowledge and thinking in a variety of ways
	• collects data through the observation of and listening to students
	• uses a variety of assessment tools
	   . NUMPA / GLOSS
	   . IKANZ
	   . PAT –Years 3-6
	   . ARBs http://arb.nzcer.org.nz/
	   . National Exemplars
	http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/exemplars/maths/index_e.php
	• planning and teaching reflects assessment information
	• assesses learning against National Standards
	• records data as per Knighton Assessment Schedule
	Assessment schedule 2009 1.
	• Reports progress of student's goals to parents and students in written form twice a year.	

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	http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/exemplars/maths/index_e.php
	• planning and teaching reflects assessment information
	• <mark>assesses learning against National Standards</mark>
	• records data as per Knighton Assessment Schedule
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	• <mark>Reports progress of student's goals to parents and students in written form twice a year.</mark>	

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