

Principal Sabbatical Report

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To investigate how schools can maximise the potential of students reporting on their progress and achievement in ways that can enhance learning and strengthen the learning partnership between home and school.

Overview of Sabbatical

Rather than this report being a scholarly work it is a culmination of my understandings, thoughts, findings and musings developed through my investigations and reflections around the topic under study.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the Marina View School Board of Trustees for supporting my application for a sabbatical. Special thanks to the senior management of Marina View School for their leadership during my absence in particular Meredyth McFarlane and Cara Bergin – Stuart. Thanks to the various schools that opened their doors and shared their practice with me. Thanks also to the Ministry of Education for funding relief staffing to cover my sabbatical.

Introduction (Purpose)

The purpose of the sabbatical is to enhance my professional learning and effectiveness in ways that I can make a positive impact for my school and hopefully, through the resulting report, the wider educational community.

I wished to investigate the possibilities, and potential, for children reporting on; their achievement, progress and ongoing learning needs in ways that will enhance their learning. John Hattie (Visible Learning, 2009) identifies students self reporting as the most significant indicator linked to raising student achievement. Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino (How People Learn, 1999), indicate that self regulation and students taking control of their learning is a key component of students becoming successful learners. I wanted to investigate strategies for student self reporting and look at school reporting strategies that are deemed successful in theory and

research. I also wanted to investigate how schools are effectively implementing programmes and strategies to maximise self reporting in their settings.

The sabbatical proposal was designed in ways to enhance my professional knowledge and give me a balance of professional learning, reflection, and intellectual rejuvenation, to assist me to be a more effective educational leader.

I wanted to firstly gain a deeper understanding of research and theory around student self reporting, then view how a number of schools (and school leaders) are trying to translate this into practice, and from the information gained develop a way forward for my school.

I wanted to have conversations with children about their learning and their perceptions of their learning especially around self efficacy regarding becoming successful learners.

I hoped that my learning, through the sabbatical, would have a very practical outcome in leading to enhanced teaching practice and valued student outcomes at my school. I intend to use what I learnt through the sabbatical period to undertake curriculum change within my school and to share what I have learnt with colleagues.

Background Information

This was not an in depth research project, rather it was an exploration of what some schools are doing to assist students to self report and to enhance reporting between home and school.

There is much discussion in the current educational landscape regarding the need to develop students' ability to become self regulated learners and that students who have the ability to self report are more successful in their learning (Hattie, 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998).

In accepting the validity of these research assertions, I wanted to investigate how schools are translating this theory into practice. I wanted to talk to students in schools that promoted this practice to see if they in fact had an in-depth understanding of themselves as learners. I wanted to talk to students who are confident in themselves and their learning, in ways that they have an in depth understanding of; their learning, their achievement, progress and future learning needs. I wanted to discuss with school leaders and teachers what systems, processes and programmes they had put in place to achieve their goals.

I also wanted to go wider than the individual, to investigate ways that schools and homes can develop systems and partnerships that promote and facilitate self regulation and reporting, in ways that all participants involved in the learning process (i.e. student, parent and whanau) share knowledge and understandings about students learning and promote a shared commitment to further growth.

Activities Undertaken

I read research and theory on; what shapes effective learning, children's self regulation and self reporting. I viewed assessment for learning theorists on the internet, and viewed videos and video blogs covering a range of ways that look at enhancing student achievement through self assessment, self regulation and reporting. I met with New Zealand researchers and practitioners and visited schools to look at ways children are currently reporting on their achievement, progress, and ongoing learning needs.

I visited a number of schools throughout New Zealand. I had discussions with principals, senior leaders, teachers and students and investigated the processes they have in place for students to develop as self regulated learners, to assess and report on their progress. I also inquired into the various reporting systems between home and school (written, verbal and electronic) with a special interest in how children have ownership of the reporting of their learning to parents.

Discussions with students included; them giving their understanding of themselves as learners, their views on the attributes of effective learners and them relating instances when they had shown these attributes to support their learning. I also asked students to describe their own learning achievement and ongoing learning needs, and how they are involved in the process of reporting between home and school.

Discussions with people previously, or currently, involved in research centred around the process of learning, student self efficacy and self regulation. It was invigorating to have time and a clear head, away from the business of the day to day, to have and return to professional conversations around practice. It was through engaging in dialogue in an ongoing manner that I developed clarity in my ideas and felt able to think openly and flexibly.

Findings

As stated earlier, John Hattie (*Visible Learning*, 2009) identifies students self reporting as the most significant indicator linked to raising student achievement. Students who are active learners, who test their learning, seek feedback and reflect on their learning, learn much better than those who experience passive learning situations (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Ministry of Education 2006). The role of the school and teacher therefore should be to manage the teaching and learning environment to maximise active and self regulated learning in teaching and learning experiences and to assist the development of these attributes in students (Absolum, 2006). I sought to visit schools that had school leaders and teachers who espoused such learning theories and goals. I looked to see if theory did transform into practice and if I could see students who had high expectations of themselves as learners, who understood themselves as learners, who were confident about their capacity to learn, who set high goals for their learning, and who were intrinsically motivated to construct and reflect upon challenging learning pathways.

In visiting a number of schools that had fully taken on the belief that students were capable of the above, I was impressed and inspired about outcomes and possibilities. On numerous occasions I saw students who articulated their learning in

a confident and competent manner and they impressed me with both their knowledge for their learning and their enthusiasm for their learning. I was also impressed that students of all ages in the primary school setting, Years 1-8, were able to develop these attributes and skills.

In discussions with school leaders and teachers, I quickly realised that these outcomes were the culmination of careful planning, clear goals and strategies, and an iterative process of trial, reflection and enhancement. Children needed clear instruction, modelling, scaffolding and support to develop the attributes of self regulation. The schools had in fact clearly applied the strategies that were articulated and promoted by Black and Wiliam and Absolum to develop the teaching and learning environments they aspired to. Leaders and teachers noted that as students became more aware of themselves as learners, their ability to self regulate and self report increasingly developed. They also noted the students' depth of understanding of themselves as learners, their self confidence and their sense of self efficacy increased. It was also repeatedly stated that the process was a long term development and one that the school stayed committed to and had put systems in place to ensure consistency of practice throughout the school.

A major role of schools is to develop constructive learning partnerships with home, and in doing so support parental involvement in their children's learning. Reporting is a key aspect of the partnership between home and school and plays a fundamental role in informing parents and whanau of students' progress and achievement. Effective reporting systems that display the principles of openness, honesty and respect lead to a strong partnership (Kofoed, 2009; Absolum, 2006).

Written reports have been the traditional method of informing New Zealand parents of their children's progress and achievement. It has however been found that the effectiveness of this reporting system is open to question (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). The Ministry of Education has also highlighted a perceived need to improve reporting systems to parents and to provide information with consistency and clarity, hence the imposition of requirements of plain language reporting and the introduction of National Standards. Student led conferences has been proposed as a reporting system that can complement and add value to the current written reporting. Student Led Conferences are seen as a way where a clear and effective reporting system can be developed to enhance the student's ability to self report (which Hattie 2009 states is a key activity to promote student achievement), and their ownership of their own learning is supported and developed (Absolum, 2006; Taylor-Patel, 2009).

The schools I visited promoted two variations of the student led conference. In one the conference was a discussion and dialogue about learning in which the student, parent/whanau and teacher were seen as equal contributors to the conversation. In the other the dialogue was between student and parent, with teachers taking a more facilitative role for a number of student and parent conversations. Both forms of student led conference had as a central premise that the student had ownership of their learning and was expected to discuss their achievement and progress in depth and also have a clear idea of their learning needs and next steps. In talking to students who were involved with both forms of student led conferences, I was impressed with the depth of understanding they had of themselves as learners, and how confidently they could discuss their learning. In talking to teachers and school

leaders, they all believed these forms of reporting to be not just effective, but significant evolutionary steps in the teaching and learning process. All also commented on the need to plan carefully, for students and teachers to learn, practice and review the process, and that effectiveness and success was more and more noticeable over time.

With technology taking an ever increasing role in schools and the wider community the possibilities and potential of electronic reporting systems are taking a practical form. E-Portals, between home and school, and electronic student learning portfolios are becoming more common.

From the various examples I viewed, reporting through E-Portals and E-Portfolios appeared to still be heavily text based and dependent on students, parents and teachers written reflections regarding the learning progress. The length and nature of the written reflections looked to be a more arduous task than was necessary and could limit the possibility of ongoing, authentic, reflection and communication between student, parent and teacher in this media. This appeared to me to not optimise the potential of the resource and could in fact limit the use of a significant resource. There is potential I believe to develop a process or format where reflections could be in the form of video blogs, so that reflections could be regular, and ongoing, verbal and visual snapshots of the students' progress and their views regarding their learning.

An area that I feel I did not investigate effectively was parents' assessment literacy and their views of the home-school reporting process. I believe that inquiring deeper into parents' views, desires and beliefs would greatly assist the home-school partnership in developing effective communication and reporting systems.

Implications

I have seen firsthand that students can articulate their learning with depth and confidence. It should be a goal for schools to have all children doing this.

We need to further investigate how to develop systems for self reporting and home-school reporting in ways that are real and powerful 'formative' experiences that have an ongoing impact on student learning.

Face to face and electronic reporting systems have real potential to have children express their understanding about their learning achievements, and needs, in ways that can elicit more 'real time' feedback and support from home and school. To develop these areas of reporting would greatly enhance school reporting processes and are a logical evolution from the written reporting processes that currently struggle to support students' formative development. Technology, I believe, has real potential to facilitate reporting in a more authentic and real time manner, we just need to find ways that ensure student voice and a clear, manageable communication system between students, teachers and whanau. Whilst technology can complement and support the reporting process, I believe that, there is no substitute for the richness of face to face dialogue between partners in learning.

To ensure that effective reporting systems develop, there needs to be a clear and consistent programme of change management undertaken. School leaders need to have a strong commitment to consistent and long term implementation of change. Teachers need to develop their pedagogical knowledge regarding; assessment, self regulation and reporting (I believe that teacher knowledge regarding self regulation is still underdeveloped in many schools). Children need to be scaffolded in learning the attributes of self regulation and then practice how to undertake reflection and self reporting. They do not know how to do this naturally. Parent education (and a real commitment by schools to partnerships with parents) also needs to be an integral part of the change process.

In conclusion

Primary aged students clearly have the ability to develop the attributes of self regulated learners. I had the privilege to talk to a number of students who had a depth of knowledge of themselves as learners which was impressive and inspiring. In talking to these students I could see that they were confident, and excited, about the learning process. They appeared as active, engaged, and enthusiastic learners. In seeing this I feel committed to ensuring that my school continues to undertake professional learning and develop systems to support and grow the development of such learners.

I feel there is still a way to go in developing effective and ongoing reporting systems that can (and should) supersede the traditional written school report. There must, I believe, be a richer and more authentic way of reporting between school and home.

From what I have learned I realised that my sabbatical goal of; a school community where all (teachers, students and whanau) are committed to supporting the development of articulate, self regulated learners who can report on the learning with confidence and look with excitement to their educational futures, is one worth working towards and one that is clearly achievable. To have an opportunity to undertake such learning has been invaluable and again I thank the Ministry of Education and Marina View School Board of Trustees for their support for me and, in turn, my school community.

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