

**Matua School  
Tauranga  
Bay of Plenty**

**PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT**

**Term 3, 2012**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Matua School Board of Trustees for supporting my application for sabbatical leave.

I also acknowledge my senior leadership team, team leaders and other school staff, who stepped up in my absence to ensure the smooth operation of our school.

I thank the Ministry of Education for making sabbatical leave available to Principals.

I have really enjoyed the opportunity to be able to take time out, to refresh, reflect, meet a variety of amazing people and re-confirm the direction our school has taken around implementing PLC (Professional Learning Communities).

Special thanks to the schools and principals I visited in NZ, Durban -South Africa and Nottingham – UK.

To all the students, teachers, Deputy Principals and Principals/Head Teachers who welcomed me into your places of work, were generous with your time and helpful in my cause, thank you for your passion, pride and enthusiasm.

## **PURPOSE**

Investigate the impact that Professional Learning Communities (PLC) have on:

- teachers motivation to work with colleagues on an interest area common to their own learning (personalised staff learning)
- student achievement outcomes when teachers focus on an area of need they have identified

## **ASPECTS TO BE INVESTIGATED**

- Impact of PLC on :
  - staff motivation
  - staff enthusiasm for their own learning
  - achieving its desired results
  - student achievement
  - traditional professional development
  - on schools budget, staffing, resourcing – including allocation of release time
  - whole staff professional development versus personalised professional learning
- What percentage of funding is allocated to PLC compared to professional development?
- How are PLC developed and how do they measure their outcomes? What are the commonalities?
- Investigate current PLC operating in schools and the reasons why and how they are formed.

## **OVERVIEW**

Matua School is has been implementing PLC since 2010. Initially the school undertook a trial PLC where a group of interested staff members investigated best practice for catering for 'non-routine' students in the Junior School. This was facilitated by our local RTLB and was extremely successful.

Embedding PLC into our school culture is one of our school goals stated in our Charter and Strategic Plan. The research would give us an opportunity to look more globally at the whole notion of PLC in relation / comparison to traditional professional development.

The planned investigation was around what types of PLC are currently in place in schools in NZ, South Africa and the UK, and the reasons they were formed and the processes used.

Information gathered would be on a range of approaches to PLC

- ways schools have gathered and used evidence
- how evidence is shared with colleagues,
- examples of programmes and ideas
- teacher reflections

The Research will give us an insight into how PLC affect teacher motivation, enthusiasm and the will to bring about effective change in lifting student achievement. It will allow us to better support staff professional learning and the needs of our students.

Part of the investigation was to look at creative funding sources that some schools may have utilised to cater for PLC's.

Results and conclusions from this research will help guide leadership within our school and within the Otumoetai cluster of schools.

## **SCHOOLS VISITED**

- 4 around the North Island of New Zealand
- 7 in Durban, South Africa
- 5 in Nottingham, UK including 1 Academy School

## Key Questions on PLC

At your school is professional Learning tailor-made (personalised)?

**YES**

How are they developed / formed?

How well do the activities offered match your staff's PL needs?

**YES**

How are these resourced - release time, etc?

What is the impact on teacher learning?

**YES**

How much time is dedicated to PLC?

What %age of the 'personnel' budget is allocated to PLC?

**YES**

What is the impact on student achievement?

What model are you using?

**YES**

What changes have you noticed about staff motivation for raising student achievement?

How do staff decide on the focus of the PLC?

**YES**

How well do you think you are preparing your teachers for their PL?

What have been some successes / implications of PLC?

**YES**

What is the pedagogy that underpins the PLC?

**YES**

***What is the place for whole staff Professional Development ?***

***What does this look like?***

**NO**

How is professional learning developed?

## **MY FINDINGS**

### **South Africa: Durban**

I was very surprised with the lack of Professional Learning and Development that occurred in all of the seven schools I visited.

One school periodically met on a Friday afternoon for Professional Development. This consisted mainly of an administration nature – administering a schoolwide test for writing at various year levels.

Generally there was no formal PL/D (Professional Learning or Development) in these schools. Anything that occurred was very adhoc.

Financially, a budget did not allow for any ‘personal’ professional development so there was no evidence of any professional learning communities.

### **United Kingdom: Nottingham**

The UK had a vastly different outlook on PL/D (professional learning and development) compared to South Africa.

In some schools teacher strengths were utilised to run staff meetings...

- SENCO – would visit classes and see how teachers were catering for students with dyslexia as a number of these students were in the school.
- Good practice is shared amongst staff and only those with dyslexia students in their class need attend this type of staff meeting.

While there was a budget set aside for PL/D in these schools, it was minimal and therefore most PL/D was whole school and did not cater for the individual teacher. Nor was PL/D personalised for specific groups of teachers.

Schools that were seen to be high functioning and successful (based on SATS – Standard Assessment Tests results) were rewarded by being asked to provide mentoring to other schools that were seen to be failing (again based on the SAT results).

These successful schools were given an injection of funds from the government

- to deliver PD to an identified ‘failing school’
- to mentor the Leadership team of the identified ‘failing school’
- to deliver PL/D in their own school

One school, St Peters CE School worked on a model for growing leadership as a major part of whole school PL/D. It focussed on helping staff grow as leaders and is based on the book ‘Leadership Plain and Simple’ by Steve Radcliffe using an approach called ‘*Future – Engage – Deliver*’.

*Future: leading always starts in the Future*

Thoughts about:

- what you would like to see in the future
- how you would like things done
- where you would like to get to or what you'd like to build
- goals, targets, aspirations, etc

*Engage: if you want the help of others to create that Future, you'll need to engage them by*

- interacting with others in a way that has them wanting to build the future with you
- engagement, ownership, alignment, unity and team work
- bringing about change through positive relationships

*Deliver: you make things happen when*

- it ends with getting the best out of yourself and others in order to deliver the results
- you encourage and support others to make it happen

This approach is part of St Peters vision, core values, principles and learning opportunities.

Other schools were able to release teams of staff 1 day per fortnight (like our CRT) so they could be involved in PL/D that was pertinent to them and their team, however most of this time was spent with students 1-1 for assessments and marking.

**Overall**

Schools in South Africa and the United Kingdom did not appear to have the financial resources or government backing that we have here in NZ for the delivery of professional learning and development.

NZ schools are in a good position to deliver PL/D through funds managed within their operations grants. Using these funds, there is scope for whole school development through to personalised PL for individuals and groups of teachers.

With reference to BES - Teacher Professional Learning and Development by Timberley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung, NZ schools are in an advantageous position when delivering purposeful PL/D to its staff. When teachers have the opportunity to work collaboratively and dialogue around 'new learning' there appears to be a positive impact on student outcomes. "Teachers' confidence, problem-solving skills, professional abilities, and identity are enhanced as a result of this participation."

I am very pleased with Matua School's implementation of PLC's and what we have achieved so far. I see the tremendous value in continuing to give opportunities for staff to form PLC's in order for them to pursue their own learning interests and bring about positive impacts for student outcomes.

Reflecting on Matua School's PLC, I would consider them relatively successful.

- teachers generally form their own PLC based on theirs and their students' needs
- groups are no bigger than four
- the teacher inquiry model is being used
- the process is becoming more robust (however, more can be done here)
- teachers' are accountable and have to share their findings
- time is given for teams to meet
- most teachers changed their practice during / at the conclusion of the PLC
- a positive impact on student learning and outcomes

For our PLC to be even more successful there will need to be more focus on using a set of definable qualities:

- opportunities to process new understandings and their implications for teaching
- the introduction of new perspectives and challenging of problematic beliefs
- an unrelenting focus on the impact of teaching on student learning.
- Devoting more time to PLC - simply giving teachers time to talk is not enough to promote either their own learning or that of their students (BES: Teacher Professional Learning and Development p.205)

Our PLC practise will continue to be based on the Teacher Inquiry Model: ***'Teacher inquiry and knowledge – building cycle to promote valued student outcomes'*** (Ref: MOE: BES – Teacher Professional Learning and Development Fig 5.1, page xlili).