

Sabbatical Report

SELF REVIEW

Developing effective and rigorous school-wide self-review cycles that positively impact on school culture and student achievement.

Key Inquiry Questions

- *What are the qualities and features of an effective and rigorous school-wide self-review cycle that positively impacts on school culture and student achievement?*
- *How are school communities benefiting from quality self-review?*
- *How is self-review incorporated into the culture and expectations of a school?*

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Acknowledgements

A sabbatical provides a unique opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning and leadership with a clear head, what a special privilege!
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I acknowledge the wisdom, the ideas, and the advice of the principals and teachers and educational experts I have visited and talked with. Your willingness to share and your passion for the job has shown what a wonderful depth of thinking and experience and collegiality exists with New Zealand and Australia. - Mike Anderson (Waimari), and Jacqui Duncan (Cashmere), Dave Hawkey (Grantlea Downs), Mike De'Ath and Louise McDonald of the Department of Education in Victoria Australia, Greg Tucker (ERO), Mary Wootton, (Learning Media), and those I spoke with in the Naenae Cluster, Dave Appleyard (Rata Street), Judy Williams (Belmont), Denise Sainsbury (Dyer Street), and Murray Bootten and Elizabeth Ferguson (Naenae). Finally thanks to Rema Leitch for having the patience and wisdom as a valued critical friend.

When reading to understand self-review there are several key documents, reports and texts that are extremely informative and that provide plenty to reflect upon. The reference list at the end of this report details many readings that are influential in shaping current thinking and approaches. These are referred to throughout this report.

Executive Summary

This report draws together current research and writings that highlight that effective self-review enables a school to identify, to measure and to sustain a continuous cycle of self-improvement. Strengths can then be built on and gaps in student achievement, well-being and engagement can be addressed. Staff professional learning is linked to student need and through *teaching as inquiry*, schools are able to change rapidly in response to emerging needs.

Purpose

Through this sabbatical my intention was to further develop a rigorous and meaningful cycle of School Self-Review for Bluestone School, based on best practice and innovation, resulting in ongoing improvement in teacher practice and in management and governance practice, thereby lifting student achievement.

Through the readings and discussions and visits my thinking about self-review changed from systems of self-review to appreciating the real value achieved through self-review focusing on and highlighting the needs of the students and therefore the professional learning needs of teachers. There is strong evidence to show that when this occurs there is a very positive impact on student achievement. This highlighted awareness resulted in a subtle yet significant altering of my purpose and focus due to my belief that this could make an important impact on addressing the needs of those students who are not making expected progress. This focus initiates real self review at the level of highest impact on student achievement. It turns student targets around from saying "Students will improve in ____" to "Teachers will ____ so that students can".

Background and Rationale

The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) set out the requirement for school self-review, stating that the board of trustees, together with the principal and teaching staff are responsible for ...maintaining an ongoing programme of self-review. Self-review is about continuous self-improvement, with the child clearly at the centre of this focus. Robinson (16) notes that 'one of the most powerful ways that school leaders make a positive difference to the achievement and well being of their students is through their leadership of the improvement of teaching and learning.'

With this in mind, the time and clear thinking space afforded by a sabbatical, allows reflection on how quality self-review can meet the requirements of the complex reality of a school and at the same time provide a sharpness to the focus on improving teacher practice and therefore student achievement and well being.

Methodology

This sabbatical involved a literature search, visits to schools identified as exhibiting high quality self-review, discussions with those involved in self-review in those schools, interviews with educational consultants, and a visit to a cluster that has made significant improvement to student outcomes.

Findings

New Zealand is leading the world with its emphasis on schools undertaking reviews of their own performance. (18)

Self-review needs to be a state of mind, embedded in the culture of the school. ERO (10) encourages teachers and school leaders to have an 'Inquiry habit of mind' so that inquiry and reflection are used to think about where you are, where you are going, how you will get there, then how well it is working, and are adjustments required.

'Self-review should be a habit not an event" (15)

Self-review is not new and much of what you already do fits under that umbrella. (13)

Self-review is both a *process* (gathering data to make claims), and a *product* (the summary statement of what the evidence shows) to inform the goal setting, the implementation of strategies and the measuring of their success. Self-review is a deliberate and ongoing process to find out how well practice enhances children's learning, what's working well, what could be done better, so that decisions can be made about what to improve, transforming practice so children's learning benefits. Self-review improves teacher performance that then affects student outcomes. (9)

New Zealand and International research shows that schools with high quality self-review demonstrate improved student achievement. (6)

To embark on critical school-wide self-review you need to be clear about the changes that your school wants to implement. Develop a list of the priorities your school has in terms of improving teaching and learning. Ensure teachers feel supported and challenged as you pursue the changes to school practice identified as necessary. (12)

Schools are becoming increasingly focused on collecting and using data for improvement purposes. Interpretive conversations are central to school leaders' and teachers' ability to use the data well. (20)

Self-review is the deliberate and ongoing process of finding out how well our practice enhances children's learning and development. Review allows us to see which aspects of our practice are working well and what we could do better. As a result we can make decisions about what to do to improve. Through review our practice is transformed, and ultimately, our children's learning benefits. (13)

Self-review must involve both teachers and students in the process. Students need to be equipped with skills and vocabulary to talk on achievement. (15)

There is no one model that will meet all needs all of the time. There is no one-way – each school and community is unique, but we can learn from each other. (13) There are however models of good practice that schools can adapt to meet and establish their needs.

Self-review should be informed by evidence relating to students' progress and achievement, evaluation of teaching programmes and interventions, appropriate resources and quality of teaching, and how these link to student learning. (6)

ERO (6) & (7) provides a model of effective self-review.

6 dimensions of good practice are detailed:

- Student learning: engagement, progress and achievement
- Effective teaching
- Leading and managing the school
- Governing the school
- Safe and inclusive school culture
- Engaging parents, whanau and communities

There are question prompts under each of these dimensions that will help schools plan and implement self-review ensuring that schools focus on continuous improvement. Always central to all dimensions is the student. Any self-review activity should relate back to the basic question, *How will this benefit the child?* Keeping this question at the forefront of thinking maintains the right focus and avoids activities that are wasting time, energy and resources.

Self-reviews may be:

- **Strategic**
In-depth longer-term reviews that identify important issues that affect the school as a whole, including its community. *How can we do this better? Are we ensuring success for all our students? How do we know if we are making a difference?*
- **Regular**
Business-as-usual reviews. Regularly gather data. Monitor progress towards goals. Put programmes or interventions in place and evaluate the effectiveness of these. Fed into school strategic and annual plans. *What is happening here? How do we know? Is this working?*
- **Emergent**
Spontaneous reviews in response to an unplanned event, an issue or change that needs to be addressed promptly. *How did this happen? How can we fix it? What can we learn from this?*

ERO (6) suggests a cyclical approach to school self-review consisting of 5 steps:

- *Considering*

- Where are we? How did we get there? What do our findings show?
- *Planning*
Where do we want to be? How will we get there? Who will we need to talk to?
 - *Implementing*
What further data do we need to gather? What do we need now to do? How will we do this?
 - *Monitoring*
How well have targets been met? How effectively have resources been used?
 - *Informing*
Who needs to know? What do they need to know? How will they be informed?

The current approach by ERO is that school self-review and external reviews are complementary and mutually reinforcing processes. ERO accepts that schools are best placed to analyse their own contexts. ERO is then able to validate or challenge schools own findings. (15) The quality of self-review is one of the criteria used by ERO to decide the length of time between their visits.

The **Self Review Tools** (17) are aimed at supporting teachers, in-school leaders, and boards of trustees to use the National Standards to improve students' learning and achievement within the New Zealand Curriculum. The tools focus on improving outcomes for all students and give particular attention to those at risk of not being able to fully access the New Zealand Curriculum over time. The self-review tools can help teachers, leaders and boards to identify their professional strengths and learning needs and help to prioritise support required, by reflecting on *Where are we at now?*, *What does good practice look like?* and *What are our next steps?*

SELF REVIEW CYCLE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CYCLE

Review

Consider

- Where are we?
- How did we get here?
- What do our findings show?



Plan

Organise

- Where do we want to be?
- How will we get there?
- Who do we need to talk to?



Implement

Put in place

- What further data do we need to gather?
- What do we now need to do?



Monitor

Check

- How well have objectives been met?
- How effectively have resources been used?



Report

Inform

- Who needs to know?
- What do they need to know?
- How will they be informed?



School Leadership and Self-Reviews

There is strong evidence that school leadership plays a major role in achieving and maintaining, successful self-review.

- There is a significant role which leaders can play in using inquiry for self-review and school improvement. (10)

- For teachers to engage successfully in an inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, they clearly need close school leadership involvement, even when external facilitation is present. (4)
- Strong school leadership capacity is key to effective school self-review and school improvement. (15)
- Whole-school improvement requires everyone within the school to be involved, including leaders. (4)
- Self-review is most successful when it is led from the top. (6)
- Leaders require strong sense of urgency about solving students' underachievement. (19)
- School leaders are pivotal in developing strong self-review and evaluation cultures at the school level. (15)
- Leaders have the greatest influence on outcomes for students when they participate in and promote the professional learning of their teachers. Robinson et al., 2008 cited in (4)
- Evaluation of school leadership as an aspect of internal school review appears to be uneven. (15)
- School leaders need to engage in ongoing inquiry into the impact of their policies and practices. (19)
- In self-review 'schools benefit from the support and challenge of a critical friend' This results in deeper learning. (Robinson et al., 2009; Timperley et al., 2007. Cited in (15)
- Leading schools in a data rich world requires that leaders develop an inquiry habit of mind, become data literate and create a culture of inquiry. (11)

Successful Self-Review

- Needs to develop capability, help people learn and create high hopes and expectations. (20)
- Has the merit of being immediately responsive to the school's specific circumstances and 'owned' by the school staff itself. (15)
- Should be based on openness, honesty and trust. (9)
- It is expected that schools with the strongest performance and self-review capacity are able to sustain their performance and continue to improve on the basis of their self-review. (15)
- The value of school self-review resides in the quality of the discussions (2)
- Successful self-review is enhanced when students self-evaluate and become self-regulating learners (20)
- There is value in forming clusters of schools that share data and challenges, and pool existing data and build a collective understanding of how to interpret such outcome data. (15)
- Provides a key process through which school leaders can gather an analyse information and use the findings to establish the quality and relevance of the school's policies, procedures, programmes and practices. (6)

Warnings

- The world changes, so must schools. Ben Levin 2008 in (20)

- School self-review will not lead to improvements unless the information gathered is interpreted and translated into strategies for school development. (15)
- Be aware, in something as multifaceted as schooling improvement, instant transformations are rare. (20)
- Schools' own self-review should be so embedded in its daily practice that the visit of an external body is neither disruptive nor unwelcome. (15)
- In self-review no one should be blamed, but all need to take responsibility for solving identified problems and for inquiring into their impact on student learning and achievement. (20)
- Through self-review many schools implement initiatives to meet the identified needs of students but few systematically reviewed the effectiveness of such initiatives. (15)
- Making a difference is difficult work and requires much more than simply making changes to teaching practice. (20)
- ERO found that many trustees, school leaders and teachers did not have the statistical know-how to analyse and interpret school-wide achievement information accurately. (15)
- Self-review processes should allow for both planned and spontaneous reviews. (6)
- Telling teachers what to do has been shown to be little more effective than telling students what they should learn. (4)
- Change is challenging on many levels. There needs to be high expectation for change. The reasoning for proposed change, needs to be transparent, and linked to relevant student learning. There needs to be a supportive environment where challenges faced are discussed and worked through in a way that supports teachers, both personally and professionally. (20)
- Having large quantities of information is not the same as having high-quality information. (19)
- Simply collecting data, however systematically and routinely, will not itself improve schools. There needs to be a commitment to scrutinise such data, make sense of it, and to plan and act differently as a result. Hopkins, 2001 in (2)
- In self-review there can be a limiting effect arising from understandable reluctance on the part of those who are strongly committed to a particular strategy to recognise or accept negative evidence. (15)
- Schools do not necessarily have internal capacity for analysis and use of data and staff may not have time and motivation to devote to gathering and scrutinising data (15)
- Shifting from one idea to the next, no matter how good, usually results in superficial learning and/or teacher burnout. (19)
- Outcomes of school reviews need to be credible and useful for school development (15)
- Internal politics or power relationships within the school may influence the self-review process and the degree to which evaluation results are used to inform future developments. Santiago et al., 2011 cited in (15)

Teachers Inquiring into their Practice
Teaching as Inquiry
Model a blend of (10) & (19)

What are our students' strengths and learning needs?

What do they already know?
What source of evidence have we used?
What do they need to learn and do?
How do we build on what they know?



What are our professional strengths and learning needs?

How have we already contributed to existing student achievement and outcomes?
What do we already know that we can use to improve achievement and outcomes?
What do we need to learn to do?
What sources of evidence/knowledge can we utilise?



Engagement in professional learning

How will we embed these practices?
How will we reflect on and refine our practice?



What has been the impact of our changed actions on students?

How effective has what we have learned and done been in promoting students' learning and well-being?



Throughout this sabbatical looking at self-review a common message has emerged from the readings and from the visits and discussions. What is making a significant difference to student achievement is when self-review involves **teaching as inquiry**. When self-review identifies and focuses on the specific needs of the students and this leads teachers to identify their needs associated with this, then targeted professional learning and reflection can occur. When teachers can see that their professional learning will directly impact on their ability and success in meeting the needs of children in their class then there is greater motivation and purpose to build on current teaching practice.

Professional learning must be driven by student and teacher need to solve a specific problem or practice, or particular outcome for students, otherwise it will lack urgency and motivation to change and improve. (19)) Creating a system for self review will initiate limited change. Adaptive change is at a higher level of thinking and initiates deep sustained change to practice.

The New Zealand Curriculum describes teaching as inquiry as a process that involves educators investigating the impact of their decisions and practice on students. There are clear benefits for students and teachers when inquiry happens well. Students' needs and strengths are responded to quickly and more precisely. Inquiry is particularly beneficial for accelerating the progress of priority learners who are not achieving well. Teaching as inquiry, put into practice well by teachers, and supported effectively by school leaders, has the potential to make a significant difference for these students.(10)

Teaching as inquiry involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed. What is working well for student learning and achievement and why, so it can be continued. What is not working well and why, so it can be changed. (20)

Teaching as inquiry allows teachers to focus in on what can and will make a difference to the students in their class. It is not an easy option and requires a focused approach, but this can help teachers avoid burn-out as there is danger when teachers try to meet student needs by jumping from one idea to the next, or by including them all, that this will lead to superficial understandings, shallow interpretation and initiative overload. (20)

Leaving teachers to it does not lead to transformational changes to practice. Processes for active inquiry, learning and experimenting have to become teachers' core business of thinking as a professional. (19)

Inquiry into classroom practice involves teacher inquiry into student learning. Where a child is at in relation to performance desired. What has to happen to move learning forward. Evaluate how current (and then new) practice is effective in meeting learning needs of students. Consideration by teachers into what they might need to learn, in relation to the practices known to be effective to meet the learning needs of their students. (20)

Gaining student voice is important in teaching as inquiry. Careful questioning will show the teacher the impact of their teaching.

Teaching as inquiry needs to involve collecting evidence to show how particular classroom practices, that were the target of professional learning, are being implemented and to what extent this is affecting student learning. (20)

When change is needed there is often a need for external expertise to build knowledge and skills, but care needs to be taken to build capacity and to avoid over-dependence on external agents.

External expertise is often the catalyst that teachers need during the interpretation process to shift the conversation from blaming others to thinking about what they can change.

External experts can bring new lens to the interpretation process and can also help challenge existing social norms within groups, especially where those norms are directed to reinforcing rather than challenging the status quo. (19)

Effective teacher professional learning is motivated by their need to know rather than someone else's desire to tell. (19)

Teacher learning, like student learning, should be tailored to need and circumstance. (20)

Teaching as inquiry involves having an inquiry habit of mind so that there is an ongoing process of using data to make decisions. Those involved in this process value deep understanding, reserve judgement, have a tolerance for ambiguity, consider a range of perspectives and develop increasingly focused questions. (20)

Teacher inquiry usually takes place within the frameworks of existing knowledge. If it is to make a substantive difference to student outcomes then teachers need to operate within new frameworks, and access different kinds of knowledge that will push their thinking and challenge their practice. (19)

Leaders in schools need to develop an inquiry habit of mind which involves collecting and interpreting evidence to advance understanding, valuing deep understanding, reserving judgement, tolerating ambiguity, and considering a range of perspectives. (11)

Leaders need to create a culture of inquiry. That involves others in interpreting and engaging with the data, stimulating an internal sense of urgency, making time, and using critical friends. (11)

Changes in teachers' beliefs and knowledge through professional learning and development must result in some kind of change to teaching practices. (4)

Benefits of Teaching as Inquiry

- Inquiry is not about preserving the status quo. It is about possibility thinking (10)
- Teachers take self-responsibility for thinking about the impact of their teaching practice on students, in an ongoing way. (10)
- Effective teaching is the largest single school influence on student achievement. Self-review has major impact on informing and achieving effective teaching. Effective teachers are responsive and take appropriate action. (6)
- Identifies and selects interventions with a strong evidence base when assessment information indicates a change in direction is needed. (20)
- Successful self-review requires teachers to evaluate their students' learning and progress in order to make strategic use of this information in relation to their own practice (20)
- Involves teachers reflecting on their practice and the impact that their teaching is having on student achievement. (6)
- Helps teachers to change their teaching practice to meet the needs of all their students
- Opportunities for teachers to engage in professional learning and development can have a substantial impact on student learning. BES Timperley as cited in (4)
- Provides information from data gathered to assist in monitoring student engagement, progress and achievement, adapting learning programmes and strategies and identifying students who need further challenge or additional support
- Through teaching as inquiry adaptive expertise is developed, whereby teachers retrieve, organise and apply professional knowledge to particular learning problems, is central to effectiveness. (20)
Adaptive experts become deeply knowledgeable about both the content of what is taught and how to teach it. They know when to question their assumptions and when to let them go. They become expert in retrieving, organising and applying professional knowledge in light of the challenges and needs presented by the students they are teaching. They know when and from where to seek help. (19)
- By embedding the inquiry and knowledge building process, teachers come to constantly ask themselves, Where am I going? How am I doing? Where to next? (4)
- Helps teachers design focused personal goals and select relevant professional learning to achieve these goals
- Establishes which outcomes are sufficiently valued to justify the focus and effort. (20)
- Encourages teachers to constantly evaluate their own teaching against models of good practice.
- Identifies any gaps between what is expected and what is happening. (20)
- Measures the effectiveness and impact of changed actions.
- Having evidence-informed discussions, builds a school's capability to analyse and use data to inform teaching. Those in a professional

learning community need to be able to challenge each other's ideas while maintaining respectful relationships. (20)

- Teaching as inquiry links teaching to student learning, resulting in new approaches to solve persistent problems. (19)
- Student progress is constantly reviewed for the implications for *that* teachers teaching and learning, not for labelling students as successes and failures. (19)
- When current knowledge and skills are insufficient to solve teaching and learning problems to meet needs of all students, leaders ensure specific expertise is brought to bear. (19)
- Information becomes knowledge when it is shaped, organised and embedded in a context that gives it meaning and connectedness. (11)

Observations support Teaching as Inquiry (19)

Students' Needs

Pre-observation

Students' needs form basis of teacher learning goals

Teachers' Inquiry

Pre-observation

Learning goals established/revisited

Knowledge Skills

Pre-observation

Criteria for effective practice established

Post-observation

Practice discussed in terms of criteria

Student opportunities

Pre-observation

What the criteria would look like in practice

Post-observation

Evidence of criteria in practice

Checking

Post-observation

How students respond

Post-observation

New learning goals

- Observations and analysis of practice. Teachers have consistently rated these conversations as having a very powerful influence on their professional learning. (19)
- The criteria for effective practice need to be explicit so teachers know what effective practice looked like and why it is more effective than what they are already doing. (19)
- Pre-observation conversation. Teachers learning goals are at the centre of this and are based on student needs. The criteria is co-constructed. There may be a benefit if participants draw on wider expert knowledge when constructing criteria. (19)

Implications

If self-review is to have a positive impact on student achievement, raising the bar and closing the gap then a number of shifts in thinking and practice from traditional approaches to professional development are required.

- *From* professional development *to* engagement in professional learning
- *From* focus on teachers *to* students at the centre of the process
- *From* delivery methods *to* professional knowledge and skills
- *From* focus on theory or practice *to* join theory and practice
- *From* teachers recipient of others knowledge *to* self regulated learner
- *From* leaders organising professional development *to* leaders involved in learning and own learning (19)

Teaching as inquiry is a vital part of school self-review and allows the above to become reality.

School leaders need to: (10)

- Identify inquiry practices that are positively impacting on students' learning, and aspects of practice that could be improved
- Extend teachers' understandings of inquiry approaches and the ways these can be used to improve learning and teaching, particularly for students whose learning should be accelerated
- Establish expectations and guidelines for planning and evaluation that have a clear focus on using analysed assessment information to bring about improved learning outcomes for students
- Access support to further develop teachers' understanding of the New Zealand Curriculum

An excellent example of the above in action was found in Wellington in a Naenae cluster of schools working together to enhance literacy achievement under the facilitation of Mary Wootton (Learning Media). If there is any doubt as to the worth of teaching as inquiry then a discussion with the schools involved will quickly allay any concerns.

Benefits

- Schools that establish high quality self-review have greater capacity to sustain high performance and are better placed to effectively respond to current and emergent issues. (15)
- Self-review keeps schools focused on continuous improvement. (6)

- Teaching as inquiry, put into practice well by teachers, and supported effectively by school leaders, has the potential to make a significant difference for priority learners who are not achieving well. (10)

Conclusions

Self-review needs to become embedded in schools as a way of thinking, a culture, a state of mind.

Effective self-review highlights that the needs of the child are central to the process. Collection, collation and analysis of data from multiple sources initiates discussion at teacher level. Effective analysis of reliable and relevant data determining the needs of the child will in turn identify the needs of teachers, educational leaders, and the school community, so that they can plan and monitor to most effectively meet the challenges presented. This inquiry state of mind is embedded in Teaching as Inquiry.

Teaching as inquiry responds to the needs of learners and needs to become a useful and integral part of everyday teaching practice in New Zealand schools and classrooms (10)

Follow On

As a result of this sabbatical reflection Teaching as Inquiry will be a major focus in 2013 at Bluestone School. Queries of how this unfolds benefiting professional growth and student progress and achievement, will be welcomed.

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Must be submitted electronically to teacher.studyawards@minedu.govt.nz within three months of completion of the sabbatical.