

Principal Sabbatical Report 2013

Author

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School

Horeke School (Te Kura o Horeke), Hokianga, Tai Tokerau

Sabbatical Time Frame

Term 4, 2013

The purpose of my sabbatical was:

To reflect on my role as the teaching principal of Te Kura o Horeke (Horeke School), rejuvenate, and to investigate how environmental learning can help improve student engagement and achievement across the curriculum.

Background and Rationale

In 2005 I was appointed to the position of Teaching Principal at Horeke School, having only been teaching full-time for four years. I spent my first year attending almost any and every workshop or Conference I could, in a bid to learn as much as physically and mentally possible. Most of my first year as Principal was spent scrambling under the mounds of paperwork on my desk and struggling with the documentation required by Ministry.

In 2006, I participated in the First Time Principals programme and flourished from the opportunity to meet and learn alongside my colleagues who were also grappling with being a new Principal. I learned more from that programme than all the workshops and conferences combined in the previous year. I mainly learned to be selective about the types of professional development I undertook, and that if it didn't impact on 'student achievement' than it probably wasn't worth doing.

Over the past 8 years, I've learned and implemented systems and processes to help me in my role; I've formed valuable relationships with my staff, my parents/whanau, my Board, my community and colleagues from other schools; I believe I've grown immensely in terms of my knowledge about the roles and demands of being a Teaching Principal, however I continued to struggle to find the ideal work-life balance.

In 2012 I could feel myself becoming overwhelmed with the demands of my job, and my work-life balance was becoming increasingly unbalanced. Our school had just begun looking into the EnviroSchools programme and we were keen to learn more about how this could work for our school. I therefore applied for Sabbatical leave in the hope that I could have time away from the demands of Teaching Principal to simply rejuvenate and reflect upon my roles. I also wanted the opportunity to visit successful EnviroSchools in Tai Tokerau to investigate how environmental learning could help improve student engagement and achievement at Horeke School. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I was gifted to have a sabbatical in Term 4 of 2013.

In terms of my role as a Teaching Principal, I came to following conclusions:

- Ⓢ Time out of school has allowed me the opportunity to rejuvenate and I strongly advise that any Principal (especially those who are Teaching) take advantage of a Sabbatical
- Ⓢ We don't always find (or take) the time to sit back and fully reflect upon our roles as teaching principals. We must be critical of what we do, but we must also be realistic!
- Ⓢ As the Teaching Principal of a small rural school, it is very important that my time as both the Leader of the School and a classroom practitioner is utilised well.
- Ⓢ Upon reflection, and in discussions with other Teaching Principals of smaller schools, we are constantly 'doing loads of stuff' to keep our schools and classrooms ticking along; it is not always easy to find that work-life balance
- Ⓢ Each role (Principal and classroom practitioner) has a wide range and growing number of responsibilities; both roles are very demanding.

Ⓢ Time and work-load management strategies are essential to ensure that we maximise the quality and quantity of 'mahi' we are able to do effectively:-

- prioritising tasks and knowing deadlines is essential
 - lists of tasks to be done (including due dates) are necessary
 - number tasks in terms of priority and work through accordingly
 - 'tick off' tasks as you complete them; this gives you a sense of accomplishment as well as helping you track tasks completed
 - doing smaller and quick tasks in between larger (more difficult tasks) helps to break the monotony; work smarter, not harder.
- continual personal and professional development is imperative
 - it is your responsibility to Lead the Learning; be a good example for others
 - keep up to date with educational pedagogies and developments
 - the amount of professional reading that crosses your desk is often mind boggling; scan and skim through these and select which need more attention; have a set time in the week to read these more thoroughly
 - Conferences and workshops are invaluable opportunities for your own professional development and networking with colleagues; they must have positive impact on student achievement
 - be selective; time away from school often means more work to do
 - be reflective; how will this conference/workshop help improve your school and learning programmes
- have a well organised and tidy work space
 - file papers appropriately and often; this helps keep your desk clear and ensures you can find everything you need later on
 - ensure files are labelled clearly for quick reference
 - keep files and documents that you require often, close at hand
 - correspondence for the principal should be placed in a set place
 - any urgent documents or letters with privacy issues should be handed directly to the Principal (where possible)
 - find systems and processes that work best for you
 - utilise templates for planning and reporting, as this saves time and energy
- keep an up-to-date diary (both of school and personal events)
 - schools are typically very busy and knowing dates of events well ahead of time is important with planning and preparation
 - try to spread school events evenly throughout the Terms; avoid hosting events towards the ends of Terms as these are often quite busy with assessments, report writing and completion of classroom projects

- if possible, combine events that complement each other (i.e. Athletics and Swimming, Noho Marae and Parent/Whanau interviews (sharing learning))
- allocate definitive times for meetings on release days (where possible), try to plan for at least one undisturbed day per week
- to maintain a positive profile, it's important that you participate in all school and community events, so try to avoid any clashing of personal and public events
- stay in touch with colleagues
 - join an association that supports the kaupapa of your school
 - attend meetings (where possible) as this keeps you informed
 - seek advice from experienced colleagues where necessary
 - offer support where you can
 - keep a list of colleagues names; including schools and phone numbers
 - don't spend hours trying to do something that someone else has already done well; most colleagues are happy to share if you simply ask; acknowledge their hard work, but make it appropriate for your school

As a result of EnviroSchools visits during my sabbatical, I came to following conclusions:

- ② Environmental education is being used successfully by many schools throughout Tai Tokerau, to improve student engagement and achievement.
- ② Environmental education, if used effectively across the Curriculum, will help improve student engagement and achievement at Te Kura o Horeke.
- ② The health of our school and local environment is an important issue for our school now and will continue to be an important aspect of our learning programmes.
- ② Environmental learning looks different in every school; for some it's a nature walk tucked in the back of the school, composting bins and raised veggie gardens, butterfly gardens and butterfly mosaics, beehives and honey, chickens and eggs, vertical gardens, wetlands, shade houses and native nurseries... the list is almost endless.
- ② Regardless of what shape and form Environmental education takes in your school, the teachings and learnings must be imbedded into the culture of the school (and to some extent the wider community) in order for it to reach its' fullest potential; it should not merely be an 'add on' to your learning programmes.

- ② All staff in the school must be fully involved in the programme.
- ② Children must know and understand the processes they use in their environmental education, but more importantly, they must know and understand the purpose.
- ② We all have a responsibility to nurture our natural environment so that our planet can continue to sustain life now and into the future.
- ② I believe that the current direction Te Kura o Horeke is heading, in terms of our environmental education, is invaluable learning for our students.

Since my Sabbatical in Term 3 of 2013, we have already made the following developments and improvements:-

- the Horeke School Board of Trustees are in full support of our environmental education journey
- our EnviroSchools kaupapa has been included in Strategic Planning and budget allowances have been made for some resourcing
- in close consultation with staff (especially our grounds person), we have agreed on the following projects as part of our environmental education:-
 - increase school veggie gardens capacity
 - begin developing lower gardens for larger crops (i.e. corn, kamokamo, etc.)
 - further develop our school orchard with heritage trees
 - establish a nursery facility and a 'seed bank' for veggies
 - eco-source native seeds to start native nursery/seedlings
 - more native planting around school to attract native birdlife
 - improve composting and establish a worm farm
 - introduce a 'minimal waste' lunchbox programme
 - implement a school ZERO WASTE programme
 - improve school recycling system
 - research bees and introduce beehives on school site

Further implications for Horeke School in terms of environmental education:-

- documented evidence of our environmental journey needs to be maintained
- employment strategies need to support the direction of the school
- appropriate resourcing is needed to support our intended environmental learning
- all staff in the school need to be fully involved in the programme
- parent/whanau and community support needs to be encouraged
- staff will need to participate in appropriate professional development, especially the use of inquiry learning and education 'for' the environment
- environmental education must be embedded within our Marau-a-Kura
- the EnviroSchools programme needs to be at the foundation of our practices
- we should continue close relationships with Julie Holt, NRC and other environmental organisations
- we will be working towards a Green Bronze Award in 2014

Acknowledgements

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2. Julie Holt (EnviroSchools Adviser) for her support and advice, but especially for allowing me to visit numerous EnviroSchools on her travels around Tai Tokerau.
3. The Board Horeke School Board of Trustees – for supporting me to undertake a Sabbatical in the final term of 2013.
4. The Ministry of Education, TeachNZ and NZEI for making the sabbaticals available.
5. I would particularly like to thank the following EnviroSchools for allowing me the honour of visiting and viewing their environmental learning opportunities:
 - Oruaiti School
 - Peria School
 - Otaika Valley School (Green Bronze Enviro-School)
 - Onerahi School (Green Silver Enviro-School)
 - Umawera School (Green Silver Enviro-School)
 - Whangarei Heads School (Green Gold Enviro-School)
 - Oturu School (Green Gold Enviro-School)