

Principal's Sabbatical Report:

Term 2, 2013: Robert Mangan, Tauranga Boys' College

“It's easier to build a boy than repair a man”

Purpose:

To undertake an investigation into the role that rites of passage, rituals and traditions play in creating the culture to engage boys in their schools.

Aim:

the aim of this research was to investigate if we can introduce new practices into New Zealand schools to further engage our boys in their schools and to retain them in education at secondary school.

Background:

With the increasing demand for NCEA Level 2 to be the minimum educational qualification and the expectation that 85% of school leavers will gain the qualification by 2017, it is becoming increasingly important our boys are retained at secondary school until they have achieved this qualification. The overall aim of this investigation is to improve student learning outcomes through increased engagement and therefore increase academic achievement. This is based on the premise that the introduction of additional rites of passage, rituals and traditions in the culture and practice of the college will increase this engagement. The rationale is that as society has changed these rites of passage and rituals have become less significant so the role of these in schools is becoming increasingly important.

Traditional ceremonies such as 21st birthdays, debutant balls, and religious ceremonies are of less significance than previously. Other events such as gaining a drivers licence, turning 18 and being able to purchase alcohol or drink on licensed premises are the most significant events for the majority of our boys. Therefore the role of these rituals and traditions in schools has increased in importance in the culture of schools, with the symbolism and marking of milestones for boys, enhancing engagement within the school and the education process.

Rituals and traditions have naturally changed over time and been refined due to a range of factors. They often let us know what the particular school, community, culture etc sees as important. We can judge from these rituals, ceremonies and traditions what the values of the school are as we view the means by which they seek to transmit these values.

These traditions and rituals are a means of connecting people to others and to the school, whilst also growing understanding of other cultures. They play a significant role in growing the feeling that the individual is part of “something bigger than themselves” and understanding their relationship to those who have gone before them. They play a role in the life of school beyond merely imparting knowledge and skill but in educating the whole person.

For the purpose of this investigation I used Deal and Peterson's definitions:

Rituals:

Rituals are procedures or routines that are infused with deeper meaning. They help make common experiences uncommon events. Every school has hundreds of routines, from the taking of attendance in the morning to the exiting procedures used in the afternoon. But when these routine events can be connected to a school's mission and values, they summon spirit and reinforce cultural ties.

Traditions:

Traditions are significant events that have a special history and meaning and that occur year in and year out. Traditions are part of the history; they reinvigorate the culture and symbolize it to insiders and outsiders alike. They take on the mantle of history, carrying meaning on their shoulders. When people have traditions that they value and appreciate, it gives them a foundation to weather challenges, difficulties and change.

Ceremonies:

Ceremonies are complex, culturally sanctioned ways that a school celebrates successes, communicates its values, and recognizes special contributions of staff and students. Successful ceremonies are carefully designed and arranged to communicate values, celebrate core accomplishments and build a tight sense of community.

Jakes (2013) writes about the difference between school climate and school culture, defining school climate as the immediate conditions while school culture is the ongoing beliefs and traditions developed over time in the school community. He writes *“the culture of a school is represented by its shared beliefs, its ceremonies, its nuances, the traditions and the things that make the school unique. School culture doesn’t happen overnight. It happens over years”*, while the climate of the school is *“represented by the immediate and current conditions that exist in the school”*.

Method:

The focus of this research was from an international perspective with two parts. The first was visiting schools in the United Kingdom, specifically England, and Scotland and in Ireland, to compare their practices with those that occur here at Tauranga Boys’ College. The second part of this research was to attend the International Boys’ Schools Coalition Conference held in Richmond Virginia, with the aim of furthering my investigation and growing my knowledge in this area.

Part One: SCHOOL VISITS

I undertook visits to eleven schools in the United Kingdom and Ireland. These schools were selected for a number of reasons, some where I had developed previous connections, some for geographical reasons and to look at any differences between countries and others in partnership with a colleague who was also on sabbatical and had previous connections due to the particular special character of her school.

The schools were all high achieving schools with well established traditions and rituals, many of them having been established over 150 years ago and some nearly 500 years old, predominantly independent or special character schools.

Schools visited were:

Cranbrook School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Surrey, established 1518- Coeducational boarding- State selective grammar school.
St James Senior Schools for Boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Surrey, established 1975- Independent, non-denominational boys' day school
Blackrock College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Dublin, established 1860- Fee paying Catholic boys' day/boarding
Castleknock College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Dublin, established 1835- Fee paying Catholic boys' day school
Terenure College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Dublin, established 1860- Fee paying Catholic boys' day school
Merchiston Castle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Edinburgh, established 1833- Independent boys' day/boarding
George Watson's College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Edinburgh, established 1741- Independent coeducational day school
George Heriot's School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Edinburgh, established 1628- Independent coeducational day-primary and secondary school
Robert Gordon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Aberdeen, established 1750- Independent coeducational day school primary and secondary school
Gordonstoun	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Moray, Scotland, established 1934- Independent coeducational day/boarding school
Glen Almond College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Perth, Scotland, established 1874- Independent coeducational day/boarding

During my visits to each of the schools it became clear there were a number of common threads or themes that formed part of the culture of each of them, with a different emphasis depending on the particular character of the school.

Rites of Passage:

These schools all had events that formed part of their rites of passage as students joined their schools and passed through the various years. Those with a special religious character used religious ceremonies to mark significant events, e.g. baptism, confirmation. All schools had ceremonies to mark entry to the school and transition through the various year levels. Some had graduation ceremonies at specific stages, some at the end of each year, with all schools having a graduation ceremony at the culmination of the students time at the school. Along with these ceremonies, seniors were given additional responsibilities for leadership within their schools along with additional privileges. The various stages were marked with changes to the uniform the students wore.

As with most schools in New Zealand, entry to Tauranga Boys' College involves ceremonies to mark the event. Year 8 students spend a morning at the college for orientation after a welcome from the Year 9 and Year 10 students by way of a Haka. Then, on their first day at the college, as part of the Year 9 induction, they are challenged again by the full school performing a Haka, to make the most of the time ahead of them and to be worthy representatives of the college. This is in addition to a day with Year 13 students who provide a big brother role for the boys new to the college, and pass on their knowledge and experiences of the college.

Other rites of passage that were evident in the schools visited included shared outdoor education experiences at different year levels. These often involved physical and emotional challenges that were shared together by the students. The most impressive of these was evident at Gordonstoun School where the students undertake an eight day expedition on an 80ft schooner. This school was founded by Kurt Hahn, founder of the Outward Bound movement, with physical challenge embedded in the philosophy of the school.

At Tauranga Boys' College the boys experience a camp as a class at Year 9, then a camp at Year 10, based on their individual interest.

All schools had a means of recognising their senior students and the additional expectations and responsibilities they had in their final year. Some had the senior boys sharing morning tea with staff, whilst others gave them the freedom to attend school when they chose and use school facilities after hours without supervision.

As a result of my investigation I am considering the following:

- A welcome powhiri at Te Whanau a Aronui for all Year 9 boys on their first day
- Increasing the level of physical challenge in the Year 9 camp programme
- Creating a ceremony/event to mark the transition from Year 10 to Year 11
- Increasing the significance/privilege of gaining senior uniform and being in Year 13.

Traditions:

As would be expected with the significant age of a number of the schools I visited, they had a strong sense of tradition and the students a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves. Central to growing this sense of tradition and growing a sense of belonging was uniform. All of them had a clearly established logo, emblem and uniform that grew the sense of ownership and belonging in the students.

Each school introduced some variation in the uniform to recognise different year levels, achievement or leadership responsibilities. This was evident both within the school uniform and the uniform of the sports teams. A number had a variation between the normal uniform of the day and their dress uniform. At St James Senior School for Boys, 16 year olds wore business suits, whilst at Glen Almond School Upper 6th Year students wore a tweed sports jacket of their choice. Cranbrook's 6th Year pupils wore mufti but will return to a formal uniform at the start of the new school year. Others have a variety of dress uniform with variation in blazers to show seniority.

Ties were used to mark significant roles of leadership or achievement in academic, sporting or cultural pursuits. One school, Merchiston Castle, has a proliferation of ties and is now rationalising the number of these and how events are signified by which specific tie.

A house structure was evident in all the schools I visited. These were used to instill traditions into the culture of the school with associated ceremonies and symbols, e.g. house ties, badges, uniform, sports uniform. The interhouse competition formed a key role in engaging students in friendly competition where student leadership was developed and clearly evident.

The concept of service was also evident in all schools I visited. Each had programmes where students from the school provided service within the school, in the local area and a number internationally. As an example, Gordonstoun had an extensive service programme occupying one afternoon a week with a wide range of support given to the local community, e.g. search and rescue, fire, aged assistance, water safety, and an environmental group.

Student leadership was another tradition evident in all schools with varying models in place, from some schools where all final year students were part of the student leadership team, to others, e.g. Gordonstoun, where student leadership changed every term. Blackrock College had a student leadership council that consisted of a representative from each year level in each house being part of a school council, with responsibility for student leadership within the college.

Whole school singing was another tradition evident in the majority of the schools I visited. This activity was seen as a valued tradition for unifying the school in a shared activity.

Another common tradition was a strong old boys' association or alumni, and a desire by all present pupils to be part of this when they left the school. Underlying this tradition was an implied responsibility to continue to give back to your school after you had left to benefit those who would attend in the future.

As a result of my investigation I am considering the following:

- Ways to increase membership of the Tauranga Boys' College Old Boys' Association and developing an endowment programme and a Fellows programme
- Creating an Old Boys/Staff Tie
- Continuing to grow the strength of the Houses and enhancing the Inter-House Competition
- Continuing ways to grow the responsibilities of students for leadership within their House and College
- Growing the opportunities and recognition for service within the College, for the local community and internationally
- Investigating the feasibility of an overseas trip to Samoa to provide service for a community
- Establishing whole school singing.

Rituals:

Rituals formed a central part in creating the culture in all the schools I visited. Although these rituals varied in each of the schools, there were common elements in all.

Gathering together as a full school community was a practice evident in all the schools. These assemblies or gatherings occurred at regular intervals, ranging from weekly to daily. In the special character schools they took the form of daily chapel with a range of religious ceremonies including hymns and prayer. Gathering together was an opportunity to teach values either explicitly, or through role modelling of the values important in the school. This was also an opportunity to acknowledge achievement and excellence in a range of areas, academic, cultural and in sport, and other areas important to the school. A feature of the boys' schools was the modelling of traits synonymous with good men. These events were occasions to celebrate together achievement of students of the school on the local, national and international stage.

St James Senior School for Boys used the collective gathering as a time for meditation. The headmaster led the school as the 400 assembled boys meditated together for ten minutes. The practice of meditation is part of the daily routine at St James with meditation or quiet time held at the start of each day and in the period immediately following lunchtime.

The valuing of old boys and their achievements was another ritual evident in all schools. Considerable school pride was shown in the achievement of past pupils with the link made between the success of those who had attended the school previously and those in attendance at the present time.

Various methods were used as part of these rituals to acknowledge achievement. These ranged from certificates, excellence awards, prizes, rewards such as food or vouchers, uniform items, e.g. ties or badges, trophies. Each school placed significance on their annual prizegivings, with variation between schools on how they acknowledged their top achievers in the year. Some held separate ceremonies for academic, sporting and cultural achievement, whilst others combined these events into one ceremony. A number held events specific to the year levels acknowledging the achievement of a greater number of individuals in front of their peer group.

As a result of my investigation I will look to take action to create further rituals at Tauranga Boys' College:

- Increase the recognition of excellent behaviour and attendance, as part of the Positive Behaviour for Learning Programme
- Update the Honours Boards recognising significant achievement in order to recognise and role model the achievement of excellence
- Increase the desire and expectation to be part of the Tauranga Boys' College Old Boys' Association
- Create a Maori Achievement Evening to recognise our high achieving Maori boys
- Investigate holding a Graduation ceremony for boys at the end of Year 10 and the end of Year 13 as they leave the college.

Part Two: IBSC CONFERENCE

The second part of my sabbatical investigation was to attend the International Boys' Schools Coalition Conference (IBSCC) at St Christopher's College in Richmond Virginia, USA. The IBSC, founded in 1995, is a not for profit coalition of independent and public schools from around the world dedicated to the education and development of boys worldwide, the professional growth of those who work with them and the advocacy and advancement of the institutions that serve them. With 250 member schools the coalition is well supported by New Zealand boys' schools, with twenty other senior leaders from New Zealand schools at the conference. The conference consisted of a number of keynote addresses and workshops with some of specific relevance to my research topic.

Two workshops I attended related to the concept of rites of passage. In these workshops schools outlined the programme of shared physical challenge they provide for the young men from their schools. Paul Fleischack of MichaelHouse in South Africa described the 12 day cycling challenge their grade 16 boys are involved in cycling 300 kms, while John Perryman and Nick Sharma from St Mark's School in Texas spoke about the Pecos trip, an 8 day 7 night back-packing trip that grade 10 and 11 boys undertake. Both challenges were viewed as significant rites of passage for the boys at these schools.

Of most relevance to my research topic was a keynote given by David Banks, CEO of the Eagle Academy Foundation. (see appendix for website address). This had direct relevance to my own context, as Principal of a Decile 6 boys school in New Zealand with a number of priority learners, 23% Maori and all boys. The Eagle Academy for Young Men in the Bronx, New York, was the first single-sex boys public school to open in New York City in 30 years. The foundation and its network of public schools stand as a national model of academic excellence and social success for urban young men with a high school graduation rate of 87% - more than double the citywide rate for black and latino males.

The Eagle Academy Model is a maximised educational approach to nurture the "whole" child so that each Eagle Academy student is successful in the classroom and in life. Their goal is to provide the resources so that inner city young men can achieve their promise as students, as family members, and as engaged citizens in their communities. The result is an intimate, specialised public school, with small class size, trained and committed teachers and a full complement of in-school and out-of-school programmes.

The Eagle Academy Model features:

- Parent involvement
- Academic Rigour
- College Prep
- Extended Day and Saturday Programmes
- Rituals
- Summer Bridge Programmes for new students
- Mentoring

Eagle Academy students attend school from 8am to 5pm. A rigorous college preparatory curriculum begins in 6th grade through graduation and includes advanced placement courses. Academic rigour and high expectations flow beyond the traditional school hours to the mandatory extended day and Saturday Institute Programmes, which include workshops for parents, life-skills training and remedial services for students. Rituals establish expectations shared by students, teachers, parents, and school administrators and include school uniforms, daily town hall meetings, and athletics. Summer Bridge programmes allow incoming new students to gain a foothold in the Eagle Academy model. Mentoring brings exposure to positive professional male role models.

“Our young men see themselves as eagles, with strength, courage, vision and power. They aspire to the highest ideals”.

This keynote and the workshop following presented by Nichelle Manning, Academic Director, reinforced the values of rites of passage, rituals and traditions, in creating a culture of engagement for boys.

An additional emphasis was the need for parental involvement and commitment to support their boys in their education. This is very similar to the emphasis on consulting and engaging whanau in our New Zealand context in order for our boys to achieve academic success.

Conclusion:

Through my investigation I have found significant similarities in the rites of passage, rituals and traditions that schools in the United Kingdom, Ireland and some in the USA use to engage their boys to those that exist in New Zealand schools. Those schools with a special character have an additional platform, that of chapel services or religious ceremonies to engage their boys and transmit values. Secular schools do not have the same platform so need to find alternative ways to transmit the values important to the culture of their school. New Zealand schools however have an advantage and a responsibility with the bi-cultural nature of our schools. The advantage is to be able to use aspects of Maori culture as part of our ceremonies and rituals, e.g. Haka, powhiri, while the responsibility is to honour our commitments to the Treaty of Waitangi. These aspects must serve to engage our priority learners in the culture of our school, as well as affirm their culture.

“The Treaty of Waitangi provides a rationale for building a school culture that acknowledges kaupapa Maori, and promotes te reo Maori and tikanga Maori. New Zealand research indicates that student achievement is affected by the degree to which a student’s culture is respected by the school, and by the degree to which there is a connection between the culture of the community and whanau and the values of the school” [Bishop et al, 2007].

Jakes writes ... *“If you are interested in improving your school, add to the culture. Build the culture by adding things that create a uniqueness, that help kids grow as human beings and that establishes and maintains the school as an essential and contributory member of its community. You do that first by changing the climate of the school. Because over time the climate of the school informs the culture of the school. Over time elements of a school’s climate can become part of its culture. Truly successful schools create the conditions that enable this to occur”.*

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Appendix:

Jakes, David

<http://www.howtolearn.com/2013/03/how-to-change-school-climate-to-improve-school-culture>

Deal, T.D. and Peterson, K.D. (2009)

Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes and Promises. Jossey Bass Inc. US

<http://www.educationtransformation.org/2010/12/rituals> and traditions

<http://eagleacademyfoundation.com/about.htm>

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Powell, A., Teddy, L (2007) *Te Kotahitanga Phase 2. Towards a whole school approach*. Wellington. Ministry of Education.