

## **Primary Principal's Sabbatical Report**

**To examine the characteristics of successful transitioning of new students into primary school and identify the most successful characteristics for use in an induction or teacher awareness process for schools.**

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## **Acknowledgements:**

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Special thanks to my Deputy Principal and the Management team on keeping the school on an even keel while I have been absent.

I wish to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) for providing the sabbatical provision in the Principal's contract. This has given me time to reflect and engage critical thinking to take on new learning and to recharge.

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## **Executive Summary:**

### **Purpose:**

I propose to spend the sabbatical period of leave researching the underlying principles and processes involved in transitioning students into a primary school with a specific focus on Pacifika, Maori and English as a second language (ESOL) students. I intend to look at schools in the schools in the Ashburton and Canterbury region that have experienced major demographic change in the recent past and see what strategies and processes have achieved the successful outcomes for them.

### **Key Inquiry Focus:**

*Examine the characteristics of successful transitioning of new students into primary school and identify the most successful characteristics for use in an induction or teacher awareness process for schools.*

## **Rationale and Background Information:**

The Ashburton area is experiencing major change due to dairying and the Christchurch Earthquakes. This has resulted in the local schools experiencing a rapid change in the ethnic composition of their student body and an increase of English as second language students. Successful transitioning of these new students into our schools is vital for the school culture and student academic success. This needs to be investigated to find out what works and what does not.

## **Methodology:( Activities undertaken)**

### **Theoretical Understandings:**

- *What does the current literature have to say on transitioning students into primary schools or other relevant educational institutions?*
- *What are the important understandings to come from these readings and the relevance to current school practice?*

**Key Activities:** Literature research, reading and reflection.

The first step of my journey was to look at literature on Brian Eales, 'Cultural Responsive Curriculum' (3) and Tu Rangatira 'Maori Medium Education Leadership' (5). The Core aspects spoken about in the Cultural Responsive Curriculum revolved around successful systems, relationships and processes. These aspects of leadership need to be in place for a culture of inclusiveness and adaption that caters for the needs of all students and should be seen as a normal accepted part of the school culture.

On page 1 of 'Culturally Response Curriculum' (3), Brian says *'A cultural responsive curriculum is not just about visible signs, words, pictures and Kapa Haka songs but about systems, relationships and processes. It is about thinking and responding in a shared holistic way that is important.* He then went to say on page 2 to, *'A Principal needs to lead with amoral purpose, have a self belief (pono), be a learner (Ako), guide and support (Awhinatanga). So as a Principal you need to review your own beliefs, practice and knowledge on how they impact on Maori at the school.* This opinion has implication for all students.

Tu Rangatira 'Maori Median Educational Leadership' (5) confirmed and expanded on 'A Cultural Responsive Curriculum' (3) by defining the key aspects of leadership as being; a guardian, manager, visionary, teacher and learner, networker and advocate.

The focus of the study now shifted to "what does transition mean". Barbara Deam and others in 'Transition from Preschool to School' (2) used a clear New Zealand Gazette 2010 statement that offered direction and clarity, *'Transition is not the same as orientation, it's better to think of transition as a prolonged process that unfold through relationships and time'* page 2

Looking further into transition papers the discussion develops into how to define successful transitions and what are the indicators.

Mortlock and others in the 'New Zealand Journal of Teacher's work, Voulme 8, issue 2' (6) page 94 indicated better transitions occurred when Te Whariki is intertwined with the school's Key Competencies. It was engaged through the key Te Whariki aspects of empowerment, relationships, family and holistic engagement.

Sally Peters and Others from 'New Zealand Council of Educational Research, Set 3, 2009' (8) on page 1 indicated collaboration between early childhood centres and schools is the continuity of learning across the transition into schools and indicated the importance of activities to familiarise themselves and allow families to bridge any gaps and give a sense of belonging.

Ros Powell, 'Transitioning 5 year olds into schools, Educational Leaders, 2005' (10) talks of Te Whariki being helpful to narrowing the gap between early childhood and the school setting. The suggestions for Educators, Child and Parents (pg 6 &7) provide some useful guidance that may assist in developing some key processes and direction.

This then leads onto Sally Peters, 'Literature Review, Transition from Early Childhood Education to School, Ministry of Education, 2010' (9) She undertook an extensive review of recent papers on transition of children across early childhood to primary schools. She gave seven indicators of successful transitions within learning areas. Before I can discuss these I need to talk about how she made comparisons between documents and her use of Uries Bronfenbrenners Social Ecological Models, Ecological Systems Theory, A Framework for Human Development' (1) to do this.

Her key findings of successful transitions to school were;

1. Belonging, wellbeing and feeling suitable at school.
2. Recognition and acknowledgement of culture.
3. Respectful, reciprocal relationship.
4. Engagement of learning.
5. Learning Dispositions and identity as a learner.
6. Positive teacher expectations.
7. Building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home.

These seven areas have become the premise of my practical interview questions combined with Ros Powell's (10) suggestions to transitions.

### **Practical Understandings:**

- *What school structures, attitudes or actions promote successful transition into primary school?*
- *What do schools use to confirm the effect or impact the schools transition process has on student achievement?*
- *Develop a set of key transition indicators and processes.*

**Key Activities:** School visits, interviews, discussion around the process and observation of transition programmes.

I undertook visits to three schools that were considered successful in the adaption and transitioning of new Pasifika and Maori students into their schools. The schools were Decile 1 & 2, U3 and U4 schools. Each school was on an Education Review Office 4 to 5 Year review cycle. All the schools had New Zealand Europeans as a minority and dealt with higher numbers of English as second language students. I spoke to each Principal and the new entrant teacher where possible. Supportive observations were undertaken and supporting resources were collected when provided. Sally Peters, Transition from early childhood education to school 2010 (9) page 15 key finding were used as the basis for the interview questions. The specific questions are attached as appendix 1.

### **Findings:**

The findings are summarised from my observation and interview notes under the following headings:

#### **1. Belonging, wellbeing and feeling suitable at school**

All schools had a normal enrolment process that sorted information on pre-school education, ethnicity, health, social and home situation. Each principal undertook a meet and greet process for parents and students. The schools provided for 3 or 4 pre-school visits. Once fully enrolled the new student was introduced to the whole school at the next assembly.

Some of the additional activities run at some schools to encourage belonging and wellbeing were a buddy or two who provided a connection for in the class and the playground. The buddy introduced the new student to each duty teacher over the duty cycle. One school had a six-week transition playgroup with parents, students, New Entrant teacher, preschool teachers and PTA or Board Representatives present. Older

students Year 3 were used to show these new students and parents around. Specific Pasifika Playgroup as numbers warrant this.

A "Welcome to our school booklet" with pictures and description of key aspects with starting a new school; teachers pictures and names in the classroom, where to find toilets, desks, bag storage, playground lunch areas, office, and picture of children all ready in the junior class.

## **2. Recognition and acknowledgement of culture**

Playgroups. Culturally responsive practice, Professional development of staff, After school home work groups, Teachers need to find out who the students are. Teachers need to be interested, friendly and get onside with every child, a relationship of care. Possibly have a prayer in other languages. Take advantage of older students, Teacher aides, teachers and helpers who speak the 1<sup>st</sup> language of the student. Provide an Advocate for the child. Finally recognised key dates and events from other cultures.

## **3. Respectful, reciprocal relationship**

Staff acknowledge and talk to every parent and child where possible, Principal at the gate at the start and end of the day. New Entrant teachers must meet and greet Parents and child everyday. This can be a hand over at the start and end of the day until the child and parent are relaxed and trusting of the school. School Secretaries need to be approachable and motherly. Three way meetings at start of year and mid year need to be structured around the child and their relationships not just academic. Teachers need to know the learner, what mum and dad do. Important that is part of the Appraisal process through culturally appropriate practices.

## **4. Engagement of learning**

Use SEA test and six year net, Talk with parents and student orally over the first few weeks. Use nursery rhymes to establish participation and independence level. How well they follow verbal instructions. Social talk about where they come from this can open the level of experiences to build on. Ask for their ECE portfolio if they have been in Early childhood Centre. Staff visit pre-school for back ground information. Building the learning story on each child the transition group visit may answer this.

## **5. Learning Dispositions and identity as a learner**

Clarifying what are the learning dispositions within a school. Need Professional development (P.D.) on this. Ministry of Education P.D. Mutu Kora : Reporting Progress in Year 1 to 3 and School Wide Positive Behaviour for Learning (SWPB4L). Teachers need to plan and programme dispositions and do this in their group work. Teachers will need to record the gaps in their records as they notice what the children can do on tasks such as; follow routines, sit up on a mat, at a desk, follow a book, put their hand up, draw, get in a circle. Can they scaffold this and apply to other situations. Learning conversations with parent and child about what they can and cannot do. If the parents won't come to the school visit the home.

## **6. Positive teacher expectations and**

Every child can be successful and teachers must have high expectations of all students no matter what their ethnicity or current situation. It involves dispositions/values as well as academic success. A New Entrant teacher sets academic expectations of Green level 3 (Reading level 14) in reading, School writing at 1 /3 and dispositions of being able to unpack their bag, write their name, follow instructions, share equipment, toilet themselves and take turns.

## **7. Building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home.**

Enrolment forms and ESOL through chat. Use an interpreter where necessary. Send home a survey on the child that includes social and learning experiences. Teachers regularly talk with Parents on an informal basis and gather incidental information while talking with students. Transition to school Playgroup. Most expressed a desire to obtain more information from preschools (Portfolios) and to visit and have a better understanding of Te Whariki document.

An additional observation about all the schools was their open, friendly manner. Everyone welcomed me into their school, readily shared their thoughts and ideas. You felt most welcome by all the staff and students you meet. The open inquisitive manner and friendly smiles confirmed these schools are living their stated intentions as supportive places of learning for all students no matter the ethnicity and cultural background. All the schools reflected a true inclusive culture that had real expectations on members within their communities.

## **Implications:**

### **1. Belonging, wellbeing and feeling suitable at school**

Schools need to maintain their current practices but should ensure they take time to inform students and parents about the school and ensure they get to know the student and parents as individuals and by name. The school needs to be a home away from home. Include a student buddy system based on some connection where possible that must extend into the playground. The buddy needs to introduce the student to all duty teachers over the duty cycle.

### **2. Recognition and acknowledgement of culture**

All Staff need to have culturally responsive practice and this will involve Professional development and needs to be an ongoing part of teacher appraisal. Ensure there is an advocate within the school for every culture.

### **3. Respectful, reciprocal relationship**

Knowing how to say all student and parent names. Be aware of what parents do outside of school. Ensure the children and parents are comfortable within the school and trust the school to do the best for their child.

### **4. Engagement of learning**

Develop a regular and ongoing relationship with the preschool centres. Use oral language and discussion to find out what the child can do as well as normal testing.

### **5. Learning Dispositions and identity as a learner**

Most staff need clarification on what are the dispositions and need to see that they are given equal consideration with academic achievement.

### **6. Positive teacher expectations.**

Every Teacher must have high expectations of all students no matter what their ethnicity or current situation.

## 7. Building on funds of knowledge from prior schools, early childhood education and home.

Teachers need more time to gather information from student, home and preschool.

Knowledge of the Te Whariki document is an essential part of being a New Entrant and Junior Teacher in Yr 1 & 2

## Conclusions:

Staff need to know about their children and what makes them tick.

The schools with best practice have most of the identified areas from Sally Peters literature review (9) page 15 covered in a variety of ways and have or are developing culturally responsive practice.

A long transition period has benefit to all students and build mutual knowledge trust and respect between all parties.

All Schools would benefit from PD that supports transition, cultural responsiveness and positive behaviour practice.

The development of a set of key transition indicators and processes may not be possible from this research but a list of Transition suggestions would be a starting point. Appendix 2 builds on the seven implications above and uses Ros Powell (10) suggestions on page 6 and 7 plus other aspects seen through observation as suggestions for teachers to use in their induction process.

## References:

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- 4) Education Review Office (ERO) Staff, Evaluation at a Glance: Transitions from Primary School to Secondary School, December 2012, [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)
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- 6) Mortlock A, Plowman N, Glasgow A, Transition to School: A Principles Approach, New Zealand Journal of Teacher's Work, Volume 8, Issue 2, 94 -103, 2011.
- 7) Ngā Haeata Mātauranga, How Māori Learners Transition to School, The Annual Report on Māori Education 2007/08, [www.educationallleaders.govt.nz](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz)
- 8) Peters S, Hartley C, Rogers P, Smith J and Carr M, Supporting the transition, NZCER SET 3 2009.
- 9) Peters S, Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School, Ministry of Education, 2010.

- 10) Powell. R, Transitioning 5-year-olds to School - Educational Leaders, 2005, [www.educationallleaders.govt.nz](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz).

**Appendix 1:**

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

- Q1) How do you make new students feel welcome and part of the school?
- Q2) How do you identify then acknowledge a students culture?
- Q3) How do you establish and maintain a relationship with a new student and their family?
- Q4) How do you establish the ability and prior learning of a student?
- Q5) How do you recognise the learning disposition (reciprocity (mutual and interchangeable skills), resilience, resourcefulness and reflectiveness) of each new child?
- Q6) What are your and teacher expectation of a new student?

- Q7) What prior information do you seek from home and community and use it? (ESOL, student interests, ability, cultural expectations)

## **Appendix 2:**

### **Aspects To Assist Transitioning Children Into School Including Maori And Pasifika:**

#### **1. Belonging, wellbeing and feeling suitable at school**

- All staff and children acknowledge visitors and provide help and direction where necessary.
- Try where possible to have a regular before and afterschool hand over to parents new to the school. (Treat the first six months at least as a transition time some children may need longer) For new entrants this needs to be standard school practice.
- New Entrant Rooms need to be flexible so that children can experience developmental type activities that cater for children's interests and independence.
- Explore ways the new entrant teacher can be given time to interact with prospective parents.
- Student Buddy system based on a possible connection that extends into the playground. Make sure the children are part of the process. Buddies introduce new student to duty teachers over the duty cycle.
- Plan activities that allow school visits from age 4 1/2 so children can be familiar with school
- Ensure the New Entrants know the layout of the school, key personnel and basic features such as toilets etc (Welcome to School Booklet)
- Junior School holds a "cuppa and chat" session regularly for prospective parents so they can see the school in action, meet key personnel and learn about the school. Older students can be effective ambassadors.

#### **2. Recognition and acknowledgement of culture**

- All staff need to learn how to say children's names and cultural greetings correctly. Internet can be helpful in this, as can some apps.
- Staff are aware of key celebrations, cultural events and dates.
- Explore ways the new entrant teacher can be given time to interact with prospective Maori, Pasifika and new immigrants so they can learn the correct names of students and parents and cultural aspects.
- Welcome to school booklets include a recognition of the child's culture and this can be read at home.

#### **3. Respectful, reciprocal relationship**

- Principal meets and greets parents at start and end of day. (School gates or grounds)
- School secretaries while efficient need to be approachable, warm and empathetic.
- Teachers need to be aware of what parents do outside of school.
- Explore ways the new entrant teacher can be given time to interact with prospective parents.

- Share Relevant professional development programmes with parents.
- Include culturally appropriate practices in appraisal process.

#### **4. Engagement of learning**

- Focus teaching around children's interests and life experiences.
- Use SEA and Six year net to inform parents and build a common interest.
- Use nursery rhymes and culturally appropriate legends to establish participation and independence.
- Don't rely totally on formal assessment but investigate other ways of assessing individual learning. Possibly Learning stories and portfolios from preschool or prior schools.
- Incorporate regular parent sessions with a visiting speaker or theme that expand parents knowledge. e.g. Reading Evening, Speech Therapist etc

#### **5. Learning Dispositions and identity as a learner**

- Invite new parents in to talk with the teacher about the learning strengths/weaknesses and expectations on a new student. This might involve the student identifying what they can and can't do.
- The New Entrant teachers makes time to meet with new parents and sits down with the child's learning story or portfolio and use them as a starting point.
- Professional Development (PD) to clarify what the agreed learning dispositions is for the school. Ministry of Education PD such as SWPB4L
- Teachers need to record gaps and scaffold successful dispositions so they can be applied in a variety of new situations.

#### **6. Positive teacher expectations**

- Teacher must have high expectations of all students no matter what ethnicity, and or current situations.
- Ensure expectations include dispositions/values as well as academic.
- Ensure all staff are give relevant professional development on school culture and transitioning students into schools
- Incorporate or acknowledge Te Whaariki into the New Zealand Curriculum Framework so new entrant children can move seamlessly into the school culture.

#### **7. Building on funds of knowledge from Prior Schools, early childhood education and home.**

- Senior Staff and possible New Entrant establish regular contact with early childhood centres.
- Give feedback to prior school & preschools on how their children have settled in.
- Junior Teachers have an understanding of the Te Whaariki so they can understand and appreciate the work done by preschool centres.
- Establish formal ways for the New Entrant teachers and Preschool Teachers can have time to share professionally with each other and create a two-way communication system.
- Senior Students experience a regular preschool visit and interaction.

- All enrolment and ESOL forms are completed fully and office staff engage with parents caregivers to ensure these are completed.