
PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL LEAVE STUDY AWARD

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PURPOSE

To discuss the programmes offered, and explore available research on family literacy programmes in:

- (a) Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada.**
- (b) The Pen Green Centre, Corby, England.**
- (c) Glasgow, Scotland.**

During my sabbatical leave taken from 23 April to 29 June 2007 I undertook a small research study on family literacy programmes in other countries hoping that the information gained would directly strengthen the programmes operating in Manukau City at the following schools- Bairds- Otara, Rowandale, Manurewa East, Homai, Yendarra and Mangere Bridge. I expected that the findings would inform and assist our partners-COMET (City of Manukau Education Trust), AUT (Auckland University of Technology), and our associated kindergartens, in further developing our evidence based research. I also hoped that our work and that undertaken elsewhere might inspire others who are grappling with the issue of engaging parents in education.

Our model, adapted from the Kenan Model developed by Bonnie Freeman at Louisville, Kentucky USA, has been piloted by two schools, Bairds-Otara, and our own school, Rowandale. We have conducted this pilot for four years from 2003-2006. Now in its fifth year, COMET, and AUT have assisted four other schools in initiating programmes in their communities this year.

To undertake my research I planned to visit Malaspina University at Nanaimo, and Victoria University on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, The National Centre for Family Literacy, Louisville, Kentucky, USA, and the NIACE Centre (Adult and Community Training Centre and Child Trust Fund) Leicester, England, the PEN GREEN Centre at Corby, England, and Glasgow University, Glasgow, Scotland.

I made requests to key people in these institutions and provided a list of my questions.. I briefed personnel on the successful outcomes of the PricewaterhouseCoopers research and my desire to gain information which would strengthen the work of the Manukau Family Literacy Programme. I wish to acknowledge and thank these people for their help and support. Regretfully electrical storms and subsequent cancelled flights along with the forthcoming Kentucky Derby prevented me getting to Kentucky as arranged, and it was not possible to fit my travel arrangements in with the personnel at the NIACE Centre.

At Nanaimo I met with a group of personnel at the Malaspina University, and at Victoria University I was asked to make a presentation in their REACH Programme (Research in Early Childhood Care, Education and Health). At the PEN GREEN Centre, I met with several personnel and was shown the facilities. Glasgow University has a Department of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE) and it was through this department that I was asked to take a seminar which they called, "The Development and Evaluation of a Family Literacy Programme in Auckland, NZ."

While I was happy to describe our pilot programme and the outcomes it was not easy to gain the in-depth answers to my questions, and it became apparent that data was limited. No-one had collected data to measure the social-economic outcomes of their programmes as had been done by PricewaterhouseCoopers in NZ.

British Columbia

Greater Victoria (pop. just over 300, 000,) has a similar population to Manukau City (pop. 328,968.)

Nanaimo on the north-eastern shores of Vancouver Island supports Malaspina University, while Victoria University is further south.

In B.C. there are 57 parenting programmes. A number of these operate at and through Malaspina. They offer a number of courses called Adult Basic Education Courses which the Ministry of Education equivalent in B.C. is now offering. These are designed to get people interested in improving their knowledge and skills, and before course completion the participants are asked, "Have you thought about going on to----?" Many of the courses are for technical skills e.g. . . . mechanical, cheffing, social work. Programmes that both husbands and wives attended were seen as the most successful as one would assist the other and their discussion levels were raised. Some of the courses were mandatory for parents to attend. They had been identified by social workers who were concerned for high risk families e.g. Parent Support Circles. Parents who were not mandated to attend generally responded better than those who were. In B.C. some programmes in the Adult Basic Education area are partly funded by parent participants and the balance is met by the B.C. MOE equivalent. Some programmes are funded by monies from "The Band" (tribes). "Nobody's Perfect," Mother Goose," and some small literacy programmes are free. There is an Indian Education Support Programme to assist "The Band" with university and living costs. Some schools have a programme of giving each child a 'book bag' containing some reading materials, crayons, notebook etc provided by a sponsorship programme. Much of the work through Malaspina is undertaken through volunteers who know the value of literacy skills. They help and encourage adults to go to courses at Malaspina. Some teachers work as volunteers to read to children in shopping centres and give away books (sponsorship provided), during late night shopping or weekends in malls, as a way of getting books into homes. Some tribal elders and their tribes with connections at Malaspina encourage tribal members to take up opportunities offered at the university e.g. The Indian Support Programme." In B.C. much of the focus of parent programmes is aimed at assisting parents in being better parents by helping their children. A programme called "Growing Together" focussed on parent and pupil needs, aimed at meeting individual needs. "Aboriginal Childcare with Secondary Training," helped parents who could have their baby on site in a Day Care Centre and go backwards and forwards to their child if needed. This sounded similar to a second chance programme operating in some NZ secondary schools for young mothers. The "Mother Goose Programme" was seen as successful. It brought families together in the evening to prepare and cook a meal together. While the meal cooked they read to the children. B.C. had mobile libraries but these have now stopped.

A programme run nationally in Canada called "Nobody's Perfect" is designed to help parents with children aged from 6-11 years.

A national programme "Strong Start," has 3 years funding .By September 2007, 80 sites are expected to be in operation .It is a child focussed programme aimed at 3-5 year olds. It was created to make a contribution to the community's effort to ensure that all young children aged 4-11 learn to read. "Strong Start" has only just got underway so it is being researched as they go. This research tends to be on a broad scale for Statistics Canada looking at national issues e.g. how many participants, gender, number completing the programme. The programme is proving successful with more children than expected. Over the initial three years of implementation assessment results were analysed to determine the effectiveness of the programme for three groups of children:

* those who fit the definition of the target group

- * those for whom English is a second language
- * those with mild to moderate learning challenges that caused professionals to predict that the child would need extra resources/programmes for a couple of years, and if the help was given now, they would not likely need special resources beyond that period.

The assessment results confirm the opinion of volunteers, teachers, and parents that the programme is very effective in meeting its goals with all of these groups of children. The programme is a free 'drop in' early learning initiative for pre-school aged children accompanied by a parent or caregiver. Parents and caregivers attending can expect to participate in organised sessions like story-time, in play activities, and in serving a healthy snack. They are likely to discover new ways to support their children's learning at home, and may make valuable connections with others attending the centre.

Some programmes will involve working directly with children while others will provide resources for parents to support them in their role of promoting strong literacy skills in their children. The programme is designed to be implemented by volunteers who do not need to have related experience. The Letters, Sounds, and Words Programme is a 10 week programme for 5 and 6 year old children. It uses short games and activities to provide repetition to help young children recognise letters, a sound each one represents, how to learn words by sight and how to learn a word by using the sounds of its letters.

There is a similar system of identifying and rating schools with high needs. They have identified groups of highest need to participate in "Strong Start" many of whom are First Nations people.

"Strong Start" B.C. centres are located in public schools and fulfil the government's election platform and throne speech commitment to use under-utilised classrooms to deliver early learning services. The province of B.C. has falling rolls thus providing spare class-rooms.

Barriers to Learning in British Columbia

Barriers include quality childcare that is affordable, transportation, and being able physically to get to the venue. A language difference between The Bands is an issue for those facilitating the programmes. Each Band has their own very separate language while some Bands have "lost" their language.

Through a programme called "Too Scared to Learn" it has been observed that there are difficulties with retention of participants. Many give up before they complete their certificate, diploma or degree.

The majority of participants are woman. As they up-skill some male partners become frustrated in being less knowledgeable and then abuse their female counter-parts. It is labelled the "Rubber-band Syndrome." Pregnancy is often an out for female participants.

Funding and Research

There was some concern that many people wanted access to small funding pools. Criteria were not always met and the delivery of some programmes was inconsistent. Some programmes are run by volunteers. In the early childhood sector not all educators had qualifications.

Monies from The Bands support some programmes.

When asked if there was evidence that showed that by raising the levels of the parent's education the educational outcomes for their children were significantly enhanced I was told that it was accepted that this would occur but there was no evidence through research.

Current data tends to be on numbers of participants, numbers completing courses etc I was told that Canada looks to NZ and Australia for leadership in literacy programmes. Canada has recently adopted our Te Whariki Curriculum for early childhood learning.

Corby-England

The Pen Green Centre based at Corby, Northamptonshire, England has a twenty-five year history.

Started by Margy Whalley, she enlisted a group of parents who were originally very opposed to social services by encouraging them to own their own centre.

Development was, and continues to be very collaborative, and integrated. It is regarded as multi-disciplinary with health, social services, and education based on one site. As it has grown some of the elements operate off site.

Initially Pen Green began as a nursery school operating on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, allowing staff to work on paper-work and development on Wednesday. Operational hours were 8.00-6.00pm and shifts for staff developed as the centre grew to being open full-time. Finding time to collaborate and meet with families and staff became a problem.

Pen Green works closely with families in their homes as well as in the centre. Parents are taught to see how their children learn and develop, the signals or expressions children use when engrossed in a deep level of learning, and the key concepts of observations. A programme called Schema under-pins this. A Schema is simply a pattern of behaviour and the major ones have been identified- trajectory, enveloping, rotation, transporting, and connection.

Adults attend programmes that operate day and night, aerobics, and gymnastics, (very popular in wet weather, after school, and at night.)

There seemed to be endless rooms providing many services including a massage centre for babies, a sensory centre with sensory toys for children, a Teenage and Young Parents Room with an on-site mid-wife, a health centre with a community health worker, paediatrician and social workers, an After School Care and Pick-Up Centre, a Holiday Play Scheme, as well as anti-natal and post-natal groups.

Courses included "Growing Awareness," for parenting issues and concerns, "Keeping Up with the Children," explaining how numeracy is taught in primary school, "Communication Skills," for speaking, listening, reading and writing, spelling and grammar for gaining qualifications such as the National Literacy Test Levels 1&2, "Family Support," on how children learn and how we can support them, "The Together Group," for parents from all countries, "Introduction to Computers," "Growing Together," a reflective parenting course, "Child Care Courses," and "Counselling Skills."

Pen Green offered a "Baby Nest" for 1- ½ year olds. Pen Green does not want to turn away parents but does not want children with-out a 'minder' when children are younger than 12 months of age.

A “Nursery” operates for children under 5 years of age. This nursery has developed a “beach,” an idea picked up from the large sandpits seen in NZ pre-school facilities. The centre has many ‘drop in’ rooms where adults could find a place to chat with a professional, or have rich conversations with other parents or Pen Green helpers. These facilities were also available for study groups, counselling groups etc Pen Green is particularly proud of its Corby “Sure Start Programme.” All Sure Start team members are trained and courses they provide or facilitate are “needs based,” for the community.

Barriers to Learning

Participants are generally women. Males are participating in increasing numbers but have to juggle employment with study. For males in particular, shift work and long hours are frequently a barrier to participation.

Funding and Research

Much of the funding comes from local council while some programmes are “user pay.” Pen Green subsidises some programmes to help parents in need, their own funding being sourced from agencies, or from profits or “user pay” programmes. They state they have become skilled at “hooking into” funding applying for government funding pools, research groups, bursaries etc.

They have no partnerships with businesses as the latter are usually only interested when children are about to leave school. The government is currently encouraging businesses or private individuals into setting up and funding schools at secondary level (minimum of 2,000,000 English pounds required)

Every-one in England is required now to have basic skills in literacy, mathematics, and ICT. Builders etc must have a Workers Card to get on site so “First Step Programmes,” are needed. These are linked to early foundation programmes.

All participants at Pen Green are entered on to a data base and tracked for as long as possible. Many who were children in their programmes 25 years ago are returning to Pen Green wanting their children in the centre e.g. Nursery School and many parents are seeking qualifications through the adult training courses, or end up working at Pen Green. A training course has been developed for parents to interview parents arriving at Pen Green. There is a qualification on completion of this training. This enables them to become researchers. They have been found to be the best at getting honest answers out of other parents.

A recent development at Pen Green is certificated courses and The NPQICL (National Professional Qualification Integrated Leadership.) This is the first national programme to address the needs of leaders within multi-agency and early year’s settings. The qualification aims to provide leaders and managers with the opportunity to create an ethos of community partnership by co-ordinating coherent and seamless high quality services for children and families. Professionals as well as non-professionals can now study at Pen Green.

Considerable evaluation and research is undertaken to ensure the services provided are meeting community needs along with improvements from the recommendations they receive.

Glasgow, Scotland.

A group of educational associates from the Glasgow and Edinburgh areas met with me. They were eager to learn about the Manukau Family Literacy Programme. Scotland is not very multi-cultural but in Edinburgh alone, educationalists are dealing with 55 different dialects.

Local councils are heavily involved in over-seeing the delivery of education to communities. This had led to criticism of a very bureaucratic system.

Programmes that operate tend to attract people that have some motivation e.g. a woman realises that she needs to improve her literacy skills so she can complete forms to seek help for her child with disabilities. Social workers, health agencies, and other services are generally involved with all the participants of many programmes. They were surprised we did not have to bring all these services on board in the Manukau Family Literacy Programme.

Those who felt they had “bridged the gap,” tended to work with one key teacher in each school. They had not thought of getting the principal on board first. Following a discussion on how this has proved to be a key to the success of many programmes in NZ from MOE funded initiatives to Team Solution contracts, several stated that this may be the reason that they met with resistance and had a less than desirable impact.

Barriers to Learning

Most participants in their programmes were female. Some males were either reluctant to participate, or unable to do so due to the nature and hours of their current employment. It was also believed that many accepted their “lot” in life and had little or no motivation to improve their situation.

Funding and research

Participants in funded programmes felt there was a lot of paper-work and bureaucracy to ensure “the powers that be” had evidence of where the money was spent, but it was about data collections and internal reviews undertaken by those working within the programmes. There was great interest in having independent researchers.

Problems they were wrangling with were the difficulty in “bridging the gap” between the service providers, and those who wanted to help in the schools. Some felt frustrated because the schools were seen as reluctant.

FINDINGS COMMON to CANADA, ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, and NEW ZEALAND.

- There is an awareness of the need for evaluation or research of programmes but in most instances it is conducted internally, and is solely about where the funding is spent, how many participated or left the programme, how many male or female participants etc.
- The social outcomes are rarely considered but are the underlying evidence of the core of the problems. The social outcomes if successful hold the solution.
- Females are the predominant participants in programmes.
- The need for fund-holders to provide considerable paper-work is seen as being very time-consuming rather than the vehicle that provides the evidence for continued funding.

- Independent, international researchers had not been used in any of the places visited. There was great interest in this approach and the outcomes achieved in the Manukau Family Literacy Programme.
- The problems for adults accessing programmes were not dissimilar-
 - (a) many lack confidence, and self belief
 - (b) many lack basic parenting skills expected of modern parents in our communities
 - (c) many frequently have limited language skills along with other basic skills needed to get employment
 - (d) improving the educational levels of females has often resulted in damaging the relationship between a husband and wife.
- Longitudinal research is rare due in part to cost, and the difficulties in tracking participants who often form a transient group of the population.
- There are many programmes competing for funding. This often means that some of the better programmes receive less as funding is spread to cover wide needs.
- Most programmes do not have an inter-generational impact.
- Most programmes are aimed at solving a specific aspect e.g. raising literacy levels, improving parenting, raising skills for a specific job.

CONCLUSIONS

I have been left with the impression that in Canada, England, Scotland and New Zealand we do a lot of ‘tinkering’ in education attacking the surface but rarely penetrating to the big issues at the root of the problem. We put considerable funding and resources into these programmes with too little research into the gains made. When we are not successful is it because we only scratched the surface and “put a band-aid” on the problem?

Perhaps an ‘authority’ should assess the programmes on offer, combine the best of those which meet the needs of the nation, and pool funding to support the most successful. It would be timely with our concerns regarding gang development, increasing crime, child abuse, domestic violence, and beneficiary dependency that we expand those programmes that have been proven to reduce these issues. If the adults in our communities are not empowered to make the necessary changes to their own lives they have neither the skills, knowledge, money nor motivation to assist themselves, their children, or their grandchildren.

We have recognised for many years that parents are the ‘first teachers.’ Experience should tell us they are the ‘best teachers’ if they have the tools and support, and can positively influence their family for a life-time. Embedded in families who are not involved in crime, violence, and apathy to education, are strong family values, pride in culture, and a confidence to learn from and experience other cultures, self respect and self-worth, a desire and pride in being self sufficient, and the knowledge that much of this is achieved through education.

When adults are “trapped in poverty,” they lose much of that power and pride to direct and govern their own lives and that of their children. Their self respect is diminished. Is it any wonder that gangs hold some sense of a support line to those who have “lost their way” and become dysfunctional?

We are told that ‘education is the enemy of poverty’ but what are we doing to address it? More money is not always the answer, but delivering what we have in a different way may be a solution. If we could pool the resources and aspects of successful programmes while utilising the funding that we currently “fight for,” through various funding sources I am sure we would have much improved outcomes for the whole nation.

Many would say that it can’t be done. The research undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers of the Manukau Family Literacy Programme proves it can be done. I am convinced more than ever that if we do not empower our families nothing much will change for our children when we keep sending them back to the same situation day after day. The adults who participated in the Manukau Family Literacy Programme have proved to us all that it can be done, and in a very short space of time. These parents complete their course in 10 months graduating with “An Introduction to Early Childhood Certificate” at Level 3. Every graduate now values education and wants so much more for themselves, their children, and in some cases their grand-children. They now positively influence several generations. The programme is designed to help those identified with the greatest need in Manukau City. The model could easily be up-lifted and established in any other city in New Zealand or the Western world. It caters for a multi-cultural population who are on low incomes or are beneficiaries and aimed at those with no tertiary qualifications. Participants frequently are English second language learners with little or no confidence and as a result, are unemployed.

The programme aims at an intense degree of engagement involving adults and their children learning together. When both the learning of the child and the learning of the adult are structured elements of a single programme, family learning becomes intergenerational. This is not a parent help programme. Parents attend a course in school daily while their child is either at school or at the partnered early childhood centre. Independent research undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers indicates the majority move on to certificate, diploma, or degree courses.

Those I spoke with overseas were amazed at what our parents are achieving and all wanted to “know the secret.”

I believe COMET’S work is at the “leading edge,” and they have found the solution for many of our social and economic problems. I commend COMET for their determination in establishing the programme in Manukau, and for their efforts in guiding the development of a robust report that validates government expenditure and demonstrates the socio-economic gain to New Zealand. I urge all those interested in such work to view the programme and research on www.comet.org.nz

References

For more information on the Kenan model of family literacy, go to the National Centre for Family Literacy in Louisville, Kentucky website:
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"A Tapestry of Understanding; Intergenerational Family Learning," a discussion paper by Bernadine Vester, Robin Houliker, and Moana Whaanga.

Strong Start Programmes go to <http://www.strongstart.ca/programs.html> or info@strongstart.ca

The Pen Green Centre
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For "A Schema booklet for Parents and Carers"
"Groups and Courses,"-booklet
"The Crèche at the Pen Green Centre,"-booklet
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