

Principal Sabbatical Report

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Fenwick Primary School, Oamaru
Term 3 - 2015

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge and thank the following people for making my Sabbatical Leave possible.

- The Fenwick Board of Trustees for supporting my application and providing the time and resources to allow local study but also travel opportunities.
- Fenwick School staff for taking on extra duties, in particular, Tracey Bell (DP) for stepping into the Principal's seat in my absence.
- The Principals in South Auckland for their time and willingness to share their experience and expertise. In particular, Jocelyn Uasike for sharing her 2012 Sabbatical information.

The Talanoa Project

For the past four years Fenwick School has been part of the Pasifika Success Talanoa Project (PSTP) offered by the University of Canterbury and led by Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni (Pasifika Education Advisor and Project Leader) and facilitated by Janice Tofia (Pasifika Education Advisor, University of Otago). This initiative guided by the quality leadership of Tufulasi and Janice has provided the framework for focusing on raising the achievement of Pasifika students, upskilling school leaders and staff and reaching out to the community. The Project continues to be supported through the local Oamaru Cluster (PST).

Introduction

Oamaru, with a population of approx. 14,000, is a community undergoing significant change. In an article in The Oamaru Mail (14/05/15) they reported that Waitaki Tonga Community President, Mrs Talanoa Palu told the Waitaki District Council (WDC) that almost one in five Oamaruvians are Tongan. She had made a submission to the Council urging them to take account of the growing Tongan population in the Waitaki District Council's Draft 2015 – 2025 Long Term Plan. This rapid change in the demographic make-up of our community is also reflected in our school's community and roll. Fenwick Primary has grown from 2 Tuvaluan children in its first year as an amalgamated school in 2001 to 36 (mainly Tongan) pupils in 2015.

Change invariably involves issues and several of the infrastructure challenges for the WDC were outlined by Mrs Palu. These included English as a second language and the need for the Council to employ a Tongan speaking member of staff to provide information for Pacific families that would include: Safety in the community, fishing in the harbour, recycling and rubbish disposal and use of public venues for community events. Representation by Pacific Islanders in the development of the Council's local policy was also suggested.

We embrace the growth of our school and, in particular, the changes in our cultural make-up. It does also involve some re-thinking and challenges in *“providing the best to achieve the best”* (our School Motto) for all our students.

Purpose of Sabbatical Leave

The Pasifika Education Plan (2013 – 2017) puts *“Pasifika Learners, their parents, families and communities at the centre of the Education system, where they can demand better outcomes. The P.E.P. also aims to lift the level of urgency and pace in delivering change more quickly, in sustainable and collaborative ways between parents and teachers, community groups and education providers.”*

Our 2015-2016 Pasifika Students Achievement Action Plan recognises the school’s intentions of the P.E.P. and identifies four priority areas:

- To support leadership development
- To build relationships
- To know the Learners
- To raise achievement

Our Community Engagement Target for 2015 also had as its aim to *“Build effective, genuine and sustained relationships with Pasifika students and their families.”* Both of these documents formed the basis and purpose of my sabbatical study.

Fenwick School P.E.P. and Target Goals

Goal: To Support Leadership Development

A priority has been the upskilling of myself as Principal to lead change in our School – especially in the provision of Pasifika Education. There is also the belief that whatever is good for the achievement of Pasifika students is also good for all students. As mentioned, the involvement in the Pasifika Success Talanoa Project (PSTP), since 2012, has been vital in leadership development and has involved not only myself as Principal but also my Deputy Principal, Tracey Bell. Tracey has led our Maori Curriculum and we have both been involved in the PSTP as an extension of this area of responsibility. Her leadership has continued over the past three years to not only co-lead our school development but also she is currently President of the local Oamaru PST. This has allowed management level discussion, decision making and implementation of policy, planning, professional development and whole school inquiry.

Other recent initiatives and developments have included:

- The continued commitment by the BOT to Pasifika Education with a member having specific responsibility for this area. This also involves looking at data with greater knowledge and understanding of our Pasifika students.
- Appointment of a teacher with a strong background in Pasifika teaching.
- Appointment of a Tongan teacher aide to work in classrooms as well as leading our weekly Pasifika Cultural and Activity Group. This has included a shared meal and *Fono* in Term 4, 2015.

Further Development / Next Steps:

- Continue to develop leadership capabilities – eg., Walking DP actioned in 2016.
- Possible Pasifika Board Member (BOT Elections – May 2016)
- Training of BOT Members
 - with further development of our P.E.P. (Pasifika Education Plan)
 - to further understand the importance of monitoring student achievement information, Principal Reports regarding Pacific student achievement, high achievers and specific learning needs.
- Further Teacher Aide training, development and employment hours to work with teachers, Pasifika pupils and with Pasifika parents.
- As school leaders, ensure we have:
 - Reviewed the extent to which the School’s Curriculum responds to the various needs and interests of our Pacific students.
 - Considered strategies to make links with and consult Pacific parents.
 - Encouraged Pacific parents to be involved in their child’s learning and school activities.
 - Been responsive to parent requests and/or concerns about progress and achievement.
 - Encouraged Pacific parent involvement in decision making at school.
 - Continued to improve how we analyse and respond to information about Pacific ‘students’ presence, achievement and progress.
 - Promoted Pasifika Student Leadership.

Goal: To Build Relationships

With our number of Pasifika students growing significantly to represent 12% of our roll, the need to give greater priority to these pupils has become obvious. Pasifika parents have also gained confidence in the school and often new enrolments are relatives or extended family of current pupils.

Jocelyn Uasike (Principal of St Joseph’s School, Pukekohe) in her Sabbatical Report 2012, found in the relevant literature that there is *“overwhelming evidence that parental engagement does lead to improved educational achievement for children.”* Many of the principles involved in models are reflected in criteria published by the Education Review Office Report (2011). The first of these criteria is:

- Leadership - If there is to be meaningful engagement between schools and their communities there must be a strong, authentic commitment to this by school leaders.
- Secondly effective partnerships between school and their communities need to be built on effective relationships underpinned by mutual trust and respect. There needs to be an authentic sharing of responsibilities for student learning and wellbeing. To build successful engagement of parents the school needs to have a culture of inclusiveness where parents are able to share in decision making and feel comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns. Teachers and parents need to work together to provide opportunities for learning and sharing. Through such partnerships parents will strengthen their understanding of their child’s learning while also feeling that their contributions are valued. Effective community

consultation is essential to parent community engagement. By sharing expertise community, parents and school are able to develop a shared understanding of priorities for student achievement. Underlying all of these criteria is the need for clear effective communication. Communication must be appropriate for everyone involved. Communication barriers must be identified and overcome.

In developing our relationships with our Pasifika students and their families (Aiga) we have identified some key actions and events which have improved the home and school partnership:

- Gaining as much information as possible on enrolment and making the Fenwick School environment a friendly and welcoming one.
- Making links to family already in the school and placing pupils accordingly.
- The Pasifika Success Talanoa Project (PSTP) Oamaru Cluster Launch (Sept 2012) and further celebration nights (2013 – 2015)
- Pasifika families shared meal at school (22 Sept 2015)
- Pasifika Education Plan developed.
- Fenwick School Picnics (February)
- Pasifika students – cultural and activity group formed and have met each Wednesday 2-3pm since Term 3 – 2013, plus performed at assemblies.
- Three Pasifika parents attend a Bilingual Teacher Aide Course (5-6 Sept 2013) with Principal and Deputy Principal.
- Pasifika Education Self Review document (Oct 2013)
- PSTP – Oamaru Cluster meetings formally start (2014). These are held each term with input from PSTP leaders Janice Tofia and Tufulasi Taleni plus representatives from each Oamaru School (Teachers, Teacher Aides, BOT Members, Pasifika Parents and Leaders and other educational professionals eg., RTLB's, MOE, RT Literature)
- Waitaki Tongan Community – Tongan Day (11 Oct 2014)
- Appointment of our first Pasifika Teacher Aide (2015)
- Launch of the Oamaru Pacific Charitable Trust (14 Aug 2015). Its Aim – To help Pacific Islanders and Government Agencies to work together.
- Tuvaluan 37th Anniversary of Independence and Celebration Language Week (3-4 Oct 2015)
- North Otago Pasifika Fie Fia evening (8 schools performing)
- Fenwick Pasifika Talatalania Session – Consultation meeting and meal with our Pasifika families.

Fenwick has also been presented with three Tapa Cloths – Two from Tongan families and one from the Tuvaluan community.

Further Developments / Next Steps

- Continue to build on the actions listed and draw on local initiatives already in place.
- Develop further the initial engagement of families.
- Refine information gathering to have a comprehensive cultural profile of each Pasifika student. This will also apply to our Maori students and students of other cultures.
- Keep asking the questions; “How does our school include Pasifika culture, identity and heritage?” “Are our Pasifika Community engaged?”

Goal: Know the Learner

“The culture of the child cannot enter the classroom until it has entered the consciousness of the Teacher”

With the changing cultural make-up of our school comes the challenge for Board, leadership, teachers, the community and other students to embrace change, adapt and provide the best environment, both culturally and academically, that we can for all students.

The challenge for teachers especially is providing culturally responsive teaching – relating context to student’s own backgrounds. It also entails knowing your own culture and identity, sharing it and making the environment comfortable for the student to share their own culture.

The foundation of sound pedagogy is firstly getting to “know the learner”, as the first of the 8 Pasifika Success Talanoa Project Principles. It is also the most important.

“Culturally responsive teaching uses the students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles of Pasifika students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it involves teaching to and through the strengths of the students. It’s about teaching the whole child.” (Gay 2000)

Further Developments / Next Steps

There is a wealth of literature to support schools and teachers in the process of getting to know the learner better. These resources will also be used to develop school guidelines and practises and support teachers professional development. Teacher Inquiry will also continue to improve teacher capability and improve outcomes for Pasifika students.

Goal: To Raise Achievement (Presence, Engagement, Achievement)

When considering the achievement of our Pasifika students I have looked at the three important areas identified in the ERO – Progress in Pacific Student Achievement Auckland Pilot (2009) which also form the basis of the vision of the Pasifika Education Plan (2013 – 2017) – Presence, Engagement and Achievement.

- **Presence (Participation)**
This included looking at our information on attendance, truancy, transience and stand-down/suspensions and whether it is reliable and analysed. Also are the Board, staff and parents getting this information and know their responsibilities regarding this information? I am satisfied that there is sufficient information and that we respond to it accordingly. We are fortunate that these areas are not significant at Fenwick and are monitored effectively.
- **Engagement**
In getting to know more about Pacific student engagement at our school I have been considering the questions:
 - Have we identified the Literacy and Numeracy levels of our Pasifika Students?
 - Are we setting appropriate learning targets?

- Do we identify students who are not achieving and who are at risk of not achieving?
- Are we implementing teaching and learning programmes to meet the needs of these students?
- Is student engagement high and are students interested, well-motivated and engaged in the learning?

Do Teachers:

- Know about the academic and cultural needs of Pasifika Students?
- Have high expectations for achievement?
- Plan programmes that make connections to students' prior experiences?
- Create a supportive learning environment?
- Involve Pacific students in decisions about their learning?
- Involve Pacific parents in their child's learning?

These are part of the 'next steps' for engagement in our school's Pasifika Education Plan and Strategic Planning – not only for Pasifika children, but for every Fenwick student.

▪ Achievement

Part of the Talanoa Project self-review process on student achievement carried out in 2013 looked at:

- High expectations being set and appropriate levels of support provided as required.
- Achievement data showing levels of achievement and the effectiveness of support provided.
- Achievement data including trends and patterns over time for Pasifika students.
- Achievement information showing the achievement of individuals and groups analysed to show strengths and needs and used to inform future actions.
- Achievement results are also shared, especially the successes, with the student and family and next steps made.

Raising student achievement is always our school's educational focus. If progress and achievement isn't happening then we should create change and improvement in our school. An important next step is to carry out a further Pasifika Education Self Review aimed at helping to further build Pasifika competencies, capabilities and capacities in our school and therefore raise student achievement.

Auckland Schools

Another valuable part of my study was visiting and talking to two South Auckland Principals and drawing on their knowledge and experience in large schools with a high proportion of Pasifika students. Jocelyn Uasike (St Joseph's School, Papatoetoe) shared her 'finds' from her Sabbatical in 2012 of examples of practices that may have contributed to the successful engagement of Pasifika parents in student learning. These 30 points are also relevant to , and useful for Pasifika learners in our own school and community:

1. Parental engagement is listed as a priority in strategic and annual plans.
2. The development of parental engagement is listed as part of the principal's and teachers' performance agreement/job description.

3. A conscious decision has been made to employ good teachers of Pacific Island descent and schools have built on their cultural experience.
4. Bilingual staff have been appointed and are used as translators or to converse with parents in their first language.
5. Teacher aides of Pasifika descent work with Pasifika students.
6. The school includes a Pasifika focus / perspective in its local curriculum. It considers what learning contexts and experience will best suit their Pasifika students.
7. Staff are involved in the local community. There are multiple points of contact and parents see them on a regular basis.
8. *Early Reading Together* and *Reading Together* programmes are facilitated for parents.
9. Community meetings are held for the various ethnic groups. A key contact is identified within each ethnic group. This person often liaises with and advocates for other Pasifika parents. Meetings are organised and chaired by Pasifika parents with school staff in attendance.
10. Parent evenings / workshops to help parents understand what the children are being taught and the way their children are being taught.
11. The establishment of vertical (whanau) teaching teams. This helps parents to build relationships with staff and engage with student learning. It provides more opportunity for teachers to set up whanau meetings with parents.
12. Various types of communication are used including Facebook and mobile phones (teachers give parents their mobile number). Newsletters and other important items are translated into Pasifika languages. Verbal communication is often found to be more effective than written language for Pasifika parents.
13. Employment of school social workers and school nurses encourages the engagement of parents.
14. Professional learning and development is used to up-skill teachers in what works for Pasifika learners.
15. Teachers' knowledge of cultural practices is developed.
16. Pasifika cultures are reflected in the school's physical environment e.g., building of fale shelters, display of tapa cloth and other Pasifika artefacts, the planting of palm trees and other Pasifika shrubs.
17. The Principal makes connections and builds relationships with Pasifika families by acknowledging new babies, special occasions and having knowledge of the various Pacific Island cultures.
18. Principal's office reflects aspects of Pasifika culture.
19. There is a focus on ensuring parents have a successful experience when dealing with school staff.
20. The Principal, or other senior staff members, interview all new entrants and their parents.
21. The Principal and other senior staff have a presence in the school grounds at the end of the school day and get to know parents – learning their names and pronouncing them correctly.
22. Cultural festivals.
23. Opening evenings.
24. Sports events – school grounds are made available for community sports groups to practise.
25. The development of a school outreach programme with a sister school in the Pacific.
26. A school brochure advertising the school contains some Pasifika languages and Pasifika images.
27. Pasifika languages are used for worship and prayer.
28. School and parish community work together.

29. The school acknowledges and celebrates special days in the various Pasifika cultures, e.g., Samoan Independence celebrations, the death of the King of Tonga.
30. Flags from various Pacific Nations are flown alongside the New Zealand flag.

Jocelyn also shared barriers to parental engagement which ultimately impact on Pasifika presence, engagement and achievement:

- Pasifika parents not familiar/confident with the English language – shy to speak to teachers.
- Financial constraints.
- Time constraints (eg., work and church) – especially impacting on homework.
- Limited face to face contact with teachers.
- Access to ICT tools.
- Understanding students’ homework requirements.
- Relationships with teachers – remember to give parents greater opportunity to explain their cultural perspective.

Conclusion

Having the time to step back from the day to day demands of school management and administration and be able to look critically, openly and with a greater understanding at Pasifika Education has been a rewarding and profitable experience. It also reinforced the knowledge that improved outcomes for a group of students also applies to all students – in particular, that good quality teaching and strategies and strong partnerships with parents and communities are the most influential factors contributing to improved student engagement and achievement.

As the Education Review Office concluded in their 2009 Progress Report *“Schools with the strategic frameworks, understanding and teaching practices to improve Pacific student achievement are more likely to succeed in bringing about positive outcomes for students and their families because these are prioritised, planned for and resourced”*

Finally, my hope for the future is summarised succinctly in the Pasifika Success Talanoa Project Goal, *“the measure of success will be evidence of Pasifika students who are strong in their identity, language and culture and who are achieving to their full potential.”*

Lloyd Bokser.



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