

# **PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL REPORT 2016**

**Carolynn Phillips**

**St Michael's Catholic School**

**Remuera**

**Auckland**

## **FOCUS:**

**The Ever Changing Ethnic Diversity of Schools in inner Auckland.**

**How do we embed wellbeing for all members of our school community especially in recognizing a changing ethnic diversity in our inner Auckland suburb and as a high decile school? What does welcome & inclusion look like in reflecting the bi-cultural & multi-cultural nature of our schools?**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

- TeachNZ who awarded me the sabbatical
- The Ministry of Education for providing salary funding.
- BOT of St Michael's Catholic School
- Senior Management Team of SMCS
- Other principal colleagues
- Father Alfredo Garcia for liaising with contacts in the Philippines
- Sisters & staff from St Michael's Retreat Centre, Antipolo, Manila for their generosity of time, resources & expertise.
- Staff of the institutions I visited in the Philippines.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

### **1. Purpose & Background**

I am Principal of St Michael's Catholic School, a small decile-10 Catholic State Integrated Primary School located in Remuera, Auckland. My school enjoys a strong sense of community. Over the last 6 years our school has reflected the changing ethnic face of Auckland. In 2010 we had a roll that was 95% European, our European roll for 2016 is 64% & our Asian contingent has grown from 10% to 17.4% with 10.3% being made up of our Filipino families.

The purpose of my sabbatical was to explore our Asian cultures, in particular Filipino, & their practices around welcome and wellbeing and to gain a better understanding of how to address any of their needs. It is important that the European children and families in our community recognize and accept the cultural diversity now present in our Auckland schools and that starts at our school. The ability to nurture all diverse learners and develop a St Michael's Catholic School way of doing it may benefit other schools. Our Filipino families are part of a growing Catholic community at our Parish and their involvement and inclusion at school needs to be enhanced.

I was fortunate last year to visit China as part of the Principal's Delegation funded by the Confucius Institute in Auckland. From this visit I was also fortunate to gain a MLA (Mandarin Language Assistant) for our school and the initiation of a Mandarin Language programme at St Michael's began this year.

In considering the professional learning I would undertake on my Sabbatical, I visited a variety of high decile schools in central Auckland with diverse communities and gained an understanding of how their communities reflect their bi-cultural and multi-cultural nature. They are all so diverse and reflect Auckland's culturally rich melting pot.

The key components of **presence, engagement and achievement** were at the fore of my experiences. I met with Principals of high decile schools in the Auckland area and visited Manila, Philippines where I visited Catholic and public schools, universities and a seminary.

While in the Philippines I experienced firsthand, welcome protocols, language and culture. My guides were Sisters from the St Michael's Retreat Centre in Antipolo, Manila and I spoke with principals/directors & teachers in a variety of institutions. Here I was able to gain a better understanding of their education system, what they value as professionals and how children learn in the Philippines.

Prior to my visit I also surveyed my own community as to why they had immigrated to NZ, why they chose SMCS and what they value for their children's education and how we can make them feel welcome & included in our schools.

## **2. Methodology**

- a) I designed a survey for the principals of some high decile schools in central Auckland and also went to visit some of these schools.
- b) I designed a survey for my Filipino families at St Michael's.
- c) I visited Catholic and public schools in Manila, Philippines and also visited a university and minor seminary.

## **3. Findings**

a) After collating the surveys from the high decile schools in my area and after visiting and meeting with the principals I was able to ascertain that multi-culturalism is welcomed by all of our schools. Recognising the special celebrations pertaining to each culture is important to their communities and cultural diversity is embraced.

Schools recognize ethnic diversity by consulting with groups, gaining an understanding of what is important to the families, recognizing language and in some cases, especially with the Chinese, initiating Mandarin classes. Schools have established relationships with local maraes, businesses and leaders in the different ethnic communities; therefore drawing on the expertise of the extended whanau. All principals spoke about the importance of home/school partnerships and understanding the different learning styles of its students. The importance of understanding where our students come from is crucial, the acceptance of difference and in turn, its celebration. Schools are reflecting Auckland central's ethnic diversity and each school is richer because of it.

b) The responses from my Filipino families were detailed and very helpful. After experiencing Manila and having a brief look at the Filipino way of life in such a crowded city, I was able to gain a better understanding of their reasons for leaving their homeland. At the core of their reasons for leaving the Philippines was a desire for a better way of life for their children and their families. The hope for better job opportunities with a smaller population, less traffic congestion and a clean, green environment were also attractions in making the move (these were the reasons also mentioned in the 2015 Auckland City Council—The Auckland Plan). Some of my families already had relatives in NZ and at our school and the way they spoke so favorably about Auckland, NZ and St Michael's helped them make their decision. Interestingly the highest ranking reason for choosing St Michael's was its Cultural Diversity, how different it was 6 years ago.

So why leave the Philippines and why come to NZ?

### **Immigration Push/Pull Factors**

| <b><i>PUSH ( why leave?)</i></b>                 | <b><i>PULL ( why NZ?)</i></b>            |
|--|--|
| Overcrowding. Large population                   | Listed as Top 10 countries to settle     |
| Crime  | Safe environment to raise children       |
| Pollution  | Clean & green                            |
| Congestion of traffic                            | Less traffic; smaller population         |
| No work/life balance                             | Work/life balance                        |
| Limited time spent with family                   | Less travel, more time spent with family |
| Large class sizes ( up to 45/50 in some schools) | NZ Education System                      |
| Poverty  | More Job opportunities                   |

(In October 2014 NZCEO—NZ Catholic Education Office—collated the results of a survey to Asian parents in Catholic school communities and the following points were also alluded to then.)

The points worth mentioning are the desire of these parents to want to be fully involved with their children's education; to be fully active in the school and in our case, the parish. Many families have both parents working so ensuring the appropriate timing of meetings, interviews and school activities is important so that they can all attend.

They also wanted to ensure that teacher/parent contact was early and often, so that they were fully informed of their child's progress and achievement.

They want to gain a better understanding of the NZ Education system and they believe we are very welcoming and inclusive and are focused on the well-being of their children. They believe we are providing a well-rounded education with sound Catholic teaching and provide a high quality of education. They feel that they belong.

Their requests and suggestions centered on their culture and its traditions and they shared this in detail. They would like to see more opportunities for students to be involved in cultural activities involving food, dance, song and associated traditions.

c) My first impression of Manila was the traffic congestion and the patience of its people. When I visited Beijing and Shanghai last year the incessant tooting drove me nuts; here in Manila there were a few 'toots' but nothing in comparison. Many of the people I spoke to about the traffic, said 'well we can't do anything about it, so we need to be patient.' Manila is a city of 13 million people during the day and 8 million at night ( as approx. 5 million people return home to the countryside after work).

And poverty is not hidden. There are varied modes of transport and I experienced the frustration of sitting in traffic, that didn't appear to move, for up to 3 hours before we reached our destination.

Other first impressions were the attributes of the people—they were friendly, polite, and generous of time and spirit and fully conversed in the English language. They made me feel safe and welcome and at times, totally spoilt. Even though malls, pavements and roads were crowded, at no time, was I pushed or bumped into.

I have travelled quite extensively and I have never been to such a deliberately, proud Catholic country. Catholic signs and symbols were everywhere, from the names on the Jeppneys (traditional mode of transport) to the street names.



I visited a variety of schools both Catholic (parochial) and public; both in the poor and the affluent areas. All of the schools were very welcoming of myself and excited that a New Zealander (kiwi) would visit their schools. The students were extremely excited and apart from a visit to UST (University of St Thomas) I was surrounded by one ethnic group of students-Filipinos. Once I spoke with the principals about the purpose of my visit I was taken on a tour of the schools. The oldest school I visited was 71 years old and the youngest was just 2 years old. I was also fed and watered, as true Filipino hospitality occurs around food.

Just like NZ, the leaders and staff of these schools are passionate & focused on the child. They proudly showed off their schools. The marked difference between the 'primary' Catholic and public schools were the resources and state of the buildings. The Catholic schools get minimal funding from the government and so their resources & buildings looked older and the environment itself was less inviting. Yet, the people were effusive with their welcome. The students were respectful, welcoming and happy. In both Catholic and public schools their faith was evident as one would expect in such a Catholic country.

It was exciting to see at the public primary schools a focus on sustainability with gardens everywhere, students growing their own vegetables; recycling and reusing; worm farms etc. These gardens were bright and very attractive. Classrooms were stimulating, especially the 'junior' classes. There was limited use of technology across all of the schools I visited and even at the full campus the students did not use devices until Grade 5 (our Year 6).

A commonality with the NZ Curriculum was the language used throughout the schools especially at the De la Salle Zobel secondary school I visited, such as: collaborative, innovative, 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning, connected students etc. Students were engaged in a variety of subjects and activities and a very holistic education was provided with The Arts, Technology & Physical Education playing a comparable role as the core subjects. Seating was still quite traditional with students in individual desks and the teacher at the front of the room; though student driven learning was certainly being explored.

One of the things that really struck me and seemed to work was the size of the schools (I visited schools from between 500 students to 7,000 students) and the complete campus' as

students attended from kinder (3 or 4 year olds) to 16 to 18 year olds. At one school there was a nursery class, where size fluctuated, depending on the working needs of the parents—sometimes students as young as 2 were in this class. Family and community are very important to the people of the Philippines.

The Philippines have just adopted a new curriculum -the K12 American curriculum which has added 2 years education on to their old system. That is, students no longer leave school at 16 but at 18 years of age. There is great debate amongst principals and teachers alike about this as in a relatively poor country, to extend education by another 2 years, affects the working life of the student and affects the whole family as the child is not contributing financially for another 2 years. Many of the older teachers are also very skeptical of the new curriculum.

### **3. Implications**

#### *a) For Our School:*

- Parent/Teacher sessions will continue to occur with evening sessions but we will also provide a venue and supervision of pre-schoolers and children so both parents may attend if they so wish.
- Continue to provide specific reporting and curriculum evenings throughout the year.
- Provide a smoother transition for students from outside of NZ and explicit information on our education system. Discuss difference, welcome questions, and identify greatest need.(e.g MLE versus teacher at front of the class & single desk format; teacher as facilitator and not knower of all; student driven learning; composite classes etc.)
- Enroll the whole family and gain a better understanding of that student & family's whakapapa.
- Provide a variety of time slots for informal meet and greets where school information is shared with hospitality provided.
- Ensure through Food Technology/Cultural Days/Special celebrations that there are opportunities for families to share their cultural foods.
- Bi-Annual Cultural Day to continue but also recognize with such a large population of Filipinos some of their special days e.g United Nations Day; Independence Day etc.
- Cultural Day and beyond-establish a Filipino group where dance, music etc can be shared.
- Investigate the desire for Spanish language classes.

#### *b) For All Schools:*

- Some of the above will resonate with many schools already.
- Continue to work with colleagues in other schools who celebrate diversity.
- Shared celebrations, resources, wisdom etc.

#### *c) For Auckland City:*

- Continue to recognize the changing ethnic diversity of Auckland central.
- Include, with a growing Filipino and other Asian groups, cultural activities & recognition especially around United Nations Day.
- Continue to welcome diversity of cultures to NZ.

- Recognise that ‘one third of children in NZ live in Auckland’ (The Auckland Plan) and provide rich, cultural opportunities for all.
- Support schools with any relevant resources pertaining to cultural diversity and relevant statistical data.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In conclusion by ‘2021 the number of people of Asian origin will amount to 30% of all Aucklanders; and the Asian & Pacific proportion of the population will grow most significantly’ ( The Auckland Plan) so schools have a responsibility to ensure that they are respectfully ensuring that transition, welcome and inclusion are top of their priority lists.

Bi-Culturalism & Multiculturalism ensure our rich traditions are maintained and that we enrich them even more by exploring others traditions. Acceptance needs to be a given, tolerance (to tolerate, put up with) is not acceptable nor is ignorance.

Presence, engagement & achievement resonate for all of our families, regardless of culture and by exposing all children to the richness of diversity of languages and cultures we hope to grow well-rounded, respectfully informed, globally minded individuals. This needs to be our goal if we want these students to make a difference in our world where social status, religion, age, gender are cultural barriers are removed.

#### **References**

[www.theplan.theaucklandplan.govt.nz](http://www.theplan.theaucklandplan.govt.nz)

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