

Sabbatical Report.

Primary Principal 2016.

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Term 3.

Purpose:

How are successful schools using the data to formulate their OTJs and how are they moderating?

Is moderation being carried out collaboratively across school communities or just within schools?

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank TeachNZ for providing opportunities for the Primary Principal Sabbaticals.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Cambridge Middle School Board of Trustees for recognising the importance of the Primary Principals' Sabbaticals and allowing me to apply. The opportunity to refocus and reflect has been of great benefit to our school.

A special thank you to the schools that allowed me to come and talk with the Principal and in most cases their Deputy Principals who by and large take responsibility for the areas of my study.

I would also like to acknowledge the conversation I had indirectly with fellow colleagues around the topic of my study. This provided invaluable information.

Lastly, a special thank you to staff at Cambridge Middle School who have taken on additional responsibilities in my absence. A special note of thanks to Julie, Acting Principal, who did an amazing job and informs me she had very little time to 'smell the roses'.

Purpose:

As a change agent I wanted to see if there is a different focus/direction that I might need to adopt to ensure the accuracy of student data around National Standards levels.

Often when I am with my colleagues we would discuss the apparent inaccuracies of the National Standards levels provided to us from our contributing school colleagues. There are many occasions when the data that we receive doesn't reflect the data that we gain through our initial data collection with our Year 7 students. This has the potential to cause issues when we report and communicate with parents on their child's data. If there is a discord between what they received from their Year 6 teacher and what we say in Year 7, and they appear to have gone backwards, it can lead to awkward conversations. And, more importantly, starting the learning Year with inappropriate starting points based around previous data. Every day of learning missed is a day lost in their development and self-esteem.

I am keen to investigate how successful schools overcome this and is there something these schools do in common that can be shared across the sector?

Background/Rationale:

How do successful Intermediate Schools collect data from their contributing Schools?

Is the data they collect in line with their schools philosophy and Charter?

Are they all comparing apples with apples?

We all know that a large number of Year 7 parents compare progress of their child to the previous contributing school's data. I congratulate those that do this. However; for this to have any validity; we need to ensure the accuracy of all the data parents receive whether it is from our school or the previous school that their child attended.

With this in mind, how do successful Intermediates ensure that the incoming data is useful and compatible to their data?

Who liaises between the contributing schools and the Intermediate Schools?

For the purpose of this study, successful schools are identified as those schools having a 4 to 5 Year ERO report. I will also be talking to colleagues from schools that have been identified within the Intermediate network as running first class schools.

All schools invited to take part in the study received a call from me asking for their interest and then followed up with the following letter.

July 2016

Dear Colleague

Many thanks for allowing me to visit your school as part of my sabbatical, 2016.

One of my main areas of investigation covers the following:

“How do Intermediates ensure incoming data is useful and compatible to theirs?”

I've always questioned the validity of the National Standard a student comes to us with as our cohort hasn't always come from the same tree. We are not comparing apples with apples. Some schools may rely heavily on Surface Features and others on Deeper Features when forming their OTJs. etc

As a result, I'd like to focus on the above and get some answers around the following:-

- ❖ Are you in a COL?
- ❖ What process do you use to gather incoming data from your contributing schools?
- ❖ Are you aware of their processes in forming their OTJs?

- ❖ Is there a discord between your Year 7 National Standards data and what they came to you with?
- ❖ Are some contributing schools further out with comparable data than others?
- ❖ When moderating in writing, does your school use a variety of curriculum areas as part of the process? eg, Science, Soft Materials etc

Many thanks for providing me with information allowing me to carry out aspects of my sabbatical.

My written report will not identify schools by name.

Regards

Ross Tyson

Findings:

None of the schools visited were members of a COL. However; one Intermediate School was within a cluster that had already expressed interest and had already received their \$1000.

In every school the Principal understood the advantages a COL could bring to the collation and accuracy of data across communities. They saw this as an opportunity to have the time to put towards this important task.

The processes used to gather incoming data was very interesting because there were elements of sameness and also individual differences. In most cases the Deputy Principal would visit the contributing schools and sit down with individual teachers to gather individual profiles. This provided them with important data and expectations. One school I interviewed had online enrolment forms and when they went to the Contributing Schools they only addressed issues that might impact on individual progress. Not all students were discussed.

Data from incoming students was on the profile sheets which were then passed on to the Year 7 teachers to use as they saw fit. The Deputy Principal in charge of the data also had spreadsheets of identified needs to allow them to track students and provide appropriate learning programmes.

The majority of Intermediates I spoke to had little if any idea of how their Contributing School colleagues get the data that they received. This was because they just simply did not sit down and talk to each other. This appeared to be the major reason that they considered COLs would be beneficial for communities. (I must say that I found this information quite intriguing – it seemed to reflect on the business of a Principal's life and their inability to find the time to actually carry out some pivotal work. Work that in the long run could well make their life easier!)

When I discussed the question regarding any discord between Year 7 National Standards data and the data received from contributing schools there was an overwhelming yes from everyone. Every school was able to identify at least one of their contributing schools that knowingly provided them

with data that proved to be inaccurate when looking at the success criteria of levels of learning. In one particular case a school had five high dependency children passed on to its Year 7 Intermediate School yet no students from that school were identified as 'well below' the National Standards. There are several issues raised here and some of them are ethical in nature. The parents of these students are receiving inaccurate information which puts pressure on the Intermediate Principals when they need to explain the apparent anomaly with the data and level they give to these students.

By and large the largest number of discord data came from smaller schools. Most of you can form your own judgement around why this might be!

One Intermediate Principal worked on the premise that they were to trust all incoming data until proved otherwise. This Principal is in a COL awaiting The Minister's approval. As a cluster they are relatively new in Principal experience and work collegially together.

There was not one cluster of schools that had the same SMS system. All of my colleagues found this to be a hindrance especially when transferring data between schools. They all felt it would be much better if the systems were compatible. They did realise that in a democratic society this is not always possible yet for them it would be more convenient.

It was refreshing to know that in all circumstances the Principals felt that the data they are now receiving from Contributing Schools is much more accurate than it used to be. They all put this down to teething problems and the fact that more professional development is now available around moderation processes.

In every case there was an overwhelming agreement that schools were being judged inappropriately based on the data released into the public domain and that this data was tainted. They saw the data as being raw and standalone, not giving an opportunity to being seen in its true context. Again, they have seen improvement in this area as parents and communities have begun to grasp a better understanding of the intent of National Standards.

All schools in my study had liaison with parents by way of student led conferencing allowing the student to speak to their learning in these three way meetings. That resulted in schools being able to identify needs of parents and hold appropriate professional development sessions.

One of the interesting points my study threw up was the fact that one Intermediate School has a large number of immigrant students and a large number of ORRS students. Their ESOL department was also large. All of their students had an incredible effect on their data.

All schools were advanced in their moderation processes as you would expect and particularly strong in Mathematics and Reading. However; when it came to writing and the use of other curriculum areas involving writing, this was not prevalent. Only one school in my sample group use other curriculum areas as part of their writing levels. None of the other schools had got around to this stage of their Professional Development.

Implications:

The implications of my findings can be quite reaching and in some cases detrimental to the Intermediate that is having to justify why their Year 7 data is not as glossy or as glowing as some Year 6 Contributing School's data. This data is readily available in the public arena and may not be a true reflection of the learning and teaching of that school.

It's a blunt assessment tool. However; we are stuck with it so it's imperative that we make it work.

Consensus amongst my colleagues seems to be that COLs will create a natural environment which should allow this to happen.

In our school, we have been working closely with our contributing schools around data collection for the past six Years. As a result we have been able to fine tune the tools used in levelling students. Our COL has now been accepted and I can only see the great benefit to all students through the collaboration of our community.

Until other Intermediate Schools across the country have an opportunity to become COL members, they may continue to struggle with the validity and accuracy of their incoming data.

My colleagues appeared to understand and accept this realising that in some cases it will take longer to establish than others.

Conclusion:

It appears that successful schools are moderating extensively to ensure their OTJs accuracy.

The modernisation process is embedded in their practice allowing good learning and teaching to take place. Meetings within these schools focus on next steps rather than the moderation process itself. Students will have been identified and spoken about at learning and teaching meetings. Programmes to address their needs will also have been discussed and modified according to results.

Personally, we can feel that we are on the right track with our moderation processes and tracking the needs of our students. We have programmes to address the needs and we track and monitor closely.

Intermediate Schools receiving inaccurate information have now identified methods to overcome these discrepancies. COLs and time; in their minds; overcome this.

Principals also realise that they have work to do to satisfy the transition to Secondary Schools.

At the end of the day we actually need to be producing happy lifelong learners to ensure that there is a healthy difference being made towards our future.