Sabbatical Report

Term Two 2010

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Teacher Aide Appraisal

Focus / Purpose

The original purpose of this sabbatical was:

"To investigate current practices related to Teacher Aide Appraisal and develop an authentic and relevant method of appraisal which will increase Teacher Aide capacity, is developmental in nature and raises student achievement in my school."

The **Background and Rationale** given at the time of the proposal was as follows :

"Currently, I do not have in place a suitable appraisal system for teacher aides in my school. On inquiry I found that, in a sample of eight local schools, only four had formal appraisal systems in place. If this sample is representative it points to a significant issue in schools in terms of employment matters including the right of teacher aides, as individuals, to have appraisal systems which may lead to professional development opportunities. Such opportunities may result in up-skilling which could be seen as an advantage for further employment or progress through employment steps within the service.

In my school there are seven teacher aides, two of whom work 25 hours per week each and five of whom work eighteen hours per week each. This is a cost to the school in wages of approximately $65,000 per annum. This expenditure demands an appraisal format that is focussed on teacher aide development rather than compliance.

The recent Review of Schools' Operational Funding : Non-Teaching Staff Workforce – Final Report states that the non-teaching workforce has changed over the last seventeen years, with significant growth (16,000 in 1990 to 26,000 in 2006). It further notes that, of this workforce, teacher aides have increased in number by 29% since 1999 and now comprise the largest proportion of the non-teaching staff workforce .

I believe that an appraisal system should be tailored specifically to this group who earn significantly less than teaching staff (rightly, given responsibilities and qualifications) and who mainly work part time. The nature of their work (support of individual students, support of classroom teachers) can mean that job security and hours change as needs change within the school. For these reasons I do not believe that they should have the same level of appraisal as teaching staff but what they do have should result in added professional knowledge and job specific capability."

As my thinking and planning around this issue evolved I added a little to the focus by trying to ascertain how Teacher Aides themselves feel about appraisal. The **methodology** was to gather data for analysis by questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

There were 26 respondents to the questionnaire. There were seven schools decile 7 or higher and one school decile 3.

The data collected was as follows:

- The average number of hours worked being 23 hours per week.

- All 26 respondents believed that they had an obligation to improve their skills as teacher aides.

- What types of appraisals in place:
    - Mandatory appraisals in place - 18
        - formal / written appraisal agreement - 12
        - informal / verbal appraisal agreement - 6

    - No Mandatory appraisals in place - 8
        - the main reason for no appraisal was the very limited hours of work

    - 19 would prefer a formal process

    - 7 would prefer an informal process

- All respondents liked the idea of having an appraisal agreement in place.

    - 21 had, themselves, searched for professional development opportunities.

    - 25 had had professional development opportunities brought to their attention.

        - Principals were, by far, the ones who had most alerted teacher aides to such opportunities. (13).

        - SENCOs were the next (4).

        - Others included GSE, NZEI, Deputy Principals, Literacy, ICT and library leaders. Other means of exposure to PD opportunities occurred through newsletters and general school professional development advertising.

    - Respondents reported that in their particular circumstances no teacher aide had been an appraiser, 7 had the principal, 4 a teacher, 2 a syndicate leader and 2 the SENCOs as appraisers. (3 – no response)

    - 20 "usually" saw appraisal as a means of improving work skills. 6 "sometimes".

    - 19 "usually" wanted a say in selecting their appraisal goals. 7 "sometimes". (In fact 8 usually have ownership, 6 sometimes have ownership and 5 "never" have ownership.)

    - 16 were "usually" prepared to spend some personal / private time in teacher aide Professional Development. 9 "sometimes" and 1 "never".

- When asked if they thought it was fair to be asked to devote some private time to Professional Development
    - 9 thought "usually",

    - 12 thought "sometimes"

    - 5 thought "never".

- When asked whether the fact that appraisal had been undertaken should be considered when applying for improvements to conditions or new work.
    - 22 thought it "usually" should

- o 3 thought it "sometimes" should

- o 1 thought "never".

- Respondents were asked to select one or more of the following as an appropriate appraiser.
  - o 0 thought that another <u>teacher aide</u> would be appropriate.
  - o 15 thought a <u>teacher</u>.
  - o 15 thought the <u>principal</u>.
  - o 4 thought the syndicate leader.
  - o 2 thought the SENCO.

- Of those who have an appraisal in place,
  - o 3 never met with their appraiser,
  - o 14 met once per year and
  - o 1 met twice per year.
  - o Meetings were "helpful" for 11, "sometimes useful" for 5 and "rarely useful" for 2.

- Appraiser feedback had assisted 16 in meeting their goals. For 8 of these they recognise that it has assisted them in their practice as a teacher aide although for the other 2 the assistance has been negligible.

- 10 reported that the appraisal process made them "anxious". 8 reported classroom observations as being "always" part of the process, 4 said it was "usually" part of the process and 6 said it "never" was.

OUTCOME From the above it is clear that, while acknowledging an obligation to engage in appraisal and professional development, there is also a willingness to participate in such a process. All "liked" the idea of having an appraisal process in place and most believed it would improve their skills as teacher aides.

Given this I have developed an appraisal process for this school.

While noting that principals already take a central role in bringing professional development opportunities to the attention of teacher aides and that teacher aides had identified principals as among the people most suited to be the appraiser I have taken a different approach in developing our appraisal process.

The teacher aide appraisal does not have the principal as the appraiser. Rather, teacher aides will describe a goal they would like to work towards or explore. This is done, in writing, on a template entitled <u>Performance Development Objective</u>. The teacher aides will then be divided into groups of three. They then work towards achieving their goal. and, at a group meeting, will present a report to the group on the outcome of their work. This report is written and is part of the Performance Development Objective document. Members of the group are encouraged to question the presenting teacher aide on her or his findings and, particularly, on the effect these have had on practice. One of the group will record the questions and answers in summary form and these will be added to the written report.

The principal will view the document.

Following is (A) our Policy, (B) The Performance Management Template, (C) Reflective Questions.

(A)   Policy / Procedures

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
Teacher Aides

RATIONALE

Performance Appraisal will lead to increased professional effectiveness.

PURPOSES

Performance Appraisal of staff will achieve goals through systematically:

1.   Identifying desired work improvements
2.   Evaluating performance
3.   Recognising personal achievement

PROCEDURE

Teacher Aides will be grouped into two "Performance Development Groups" for group meetings
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Performance Management has two parts:

Part 1.   A job description which will be renegotiated with the principal each year in February.

Part 2.   Performance Development Objectives for the first group meeting will be set individually at this February meeting and recorded on the Performance Development Objectives page. Teacher Aides are to work towards achieving these objectives and present a report on them and be prepared to be questioned* about them at the first Performance Development group meeting held late June (end of Term 2)
*Reflective questions will be provided.

One of the non-presenting Teacher Aides provides a written summary of questions and answers related to this presentation. This is to be added to the appraisee's Performance Development Objectives page.

Staff appraisal is the responsibility of the principal.

The principal will view each Teacher Aides Performance Development Objectives document once the presentations have been made.

(B)   Performance Development Objectives

Presenter's Name: **Year:**

FEBRUARY: Presenter writes Objective here:

MAY: Presenter records summary of activity and reflective comments here (takes 5 minutes to present):

Summary of discussion / responses to Reflective Questions:

Summary written by:

(c)   Reflective Questions

When you are not presenting try not to jump in with advice or "your story". Let the presenting teacher aide think through their own issues. Ask only three or four questions and ones that draw out the presenter's thinking about their work.

_____

- ➤ How do you hope this activity or reading will affect your students?

- ➤ In what way does this activity or reading support or challenge your beliefs about the ways students learn?

- ➤ In what ways will this activity or reading empower the children you work with as learners?

- ➤ What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses in this activity or reading?

- ➤ Can you think of other ways you could have approached this situation?

- ➤ Are there any outcomes that occurred that you hadn't intended or thought about?

- ➤ What knowledge of your own did you bring to this?

- ➤ What evidence did you use / will you use to decide if this learning or activity or reading was successful or effective?

- ➤ What did you do well and what did you discover about your teacher aid work and student learning as a result of this work?

- ➤ Have you discovered gaps in your thinking regarding this?

- ➤ What would you see and hear to know that this activity or reading was effective?