



## **PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT**

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OPOTIKI  
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### **Acknowledgements:**

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- *Dr. Mere Berryman (Waikato University);*
- *Professor Janice Wearmouth & Dr. Mike Ayles (University of Bedfordshire);*
- *Dr. Paul Goren (Director of Charter schools-University of Chicago);*
- *The two Scottish, five English and three Chicago schools and staff. that I visited;*
- *Staff at Manaakitia o Potiki;*
- *My whanau*

### **Purpose:**

***"What can we do better to uplift the achievement of minoritised students?"***

**Background;**

**Minoritised** is a term used by *Shields, Bishop and Mazawi (2005)* and others (*McCarty, 2002*) in education to refer to groups of people who had been ascribed the characteristics of a minority. That is to say they may not necessarily be in a numerical minority however, they are treated as though their position and perspective is of a minor or lesser importance and in this way, their voices are marginalised or silenced and others speak on their behalf. For example, groups of students who often continue to be minoritised in mainstream education systems are indigenous students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, second language learners and students with learning and behavioural needs. Often these students fall into more than one of these categories.

In New Zealand, as in many other colonised countries, the acquisition of the English language, knowledge and beliefs has been held to be superior than the indigenous population.

English language skills are more highly valued as a means of communicating, retaining and transferring knowledge. This has been so pervasive in New Zealand that many Maori students have felt marginalised in mainstream classrooms and made to feel inferior. (*Bishop & Berryman, 2006*) with their own language and culture subordinated by English (*Bishop & Glynn, 1999*). As a result, a wide range of disparities in participation and learning continues to be evident in the ongoing statistical outcomes for Maori from many mainstream, low decile schools.

### **Opotiki Primary:**

Is a full primary school with a roll around 290, decile 1 and 98% Maori. The Opotiki District County has been identified, in the last three consecutive Census, as the county with the highest deprivation index in New Zealand.

We are the largest Primary School in the poorest county in New Zealand and we meet many of the characteristics of minoritised students.

### **Methodology:**

Besides doing considerable reading on how to lift the achievement of minoritised students, I was fortunate enough to be able to arrange overseas visits to some highly successful, low decile schools.

Professor Janice Wearmouth and Dr. Mike Aylen arranged visits to very successful, poor schools, with high percentage of minoritised students in the Bedfordshire areas. Some of these schools had up to 27 district ethnic groups within their schools, had up to 70% for whom English was a second language yet were regarded as being high achieving schools by their peers, education authorities, communities and academics.

I consider myself very fortunate to have known people within the education fraternity who were able to identify, contact, then arrange for me to visit schools with large percentages of minoritised students who were, against historical odds – achieving at a high level. I did not wish to visit failing schools.

In Chicago, I stayed with Dr. Paul Goren, who is Director of the four sponsored University of Chicago, Charter Schools. He was involved in a research project that looked at 100 public schools that had made significant gains in reading and math over a seven year period and another 100 schools that did not.

What they identified were "*FIVE ESSENTIALS*" of school reform that reliably lead to better schools; *Instruction; School Climate; Parent Involvement; Professional Capacity and Leadership*".

Their research found that schools that were strong in three of the five supporters are 10 times more likely to make substantial gains in reading and maths than schools that are strong in just two or less of the five essential supports.

What they found, even among Chicago's many Public and Charter schools, was that "*Whether in advantaged or disadvantaged communities, very well organised schools kept on improving and poorly organised schools stagnated*".

### **Findings:**

*"What did I find that was working and helped schools, often against the odds succeed in lifting student achievement?"*

To answer this, I have decided to not identify individual schools but rather make reference to initiatives and practices that they believe are important contributors to lifting student achievement. These are not listed in any particular order but, many are things that I think might help students.

### **Classes for Parents:**

So that they become involved in the school. Some of these classes occurred during school time, others out of school or on Saturday mornings. These include classes for;

- *Budget Advisory.*
- *Cooking simple dishes;*
- *Fitness classes;*
- *English language classes;*
- *Computer classes;* (in one school alongside their child);
- *Parenting classes;* (one school even offered a free crèche so parents could attend during school time),
- *Advisory services;* (staffed by parents for parents),
- *Volunteer mornings;* (parents turned up and were assigned tasks for 1-3 hours e.g. library, repair room etc).

### **Celebration days/weeks/months;**

For minoritised students. For a period of time, a specific culture would be studied and celebrated. Often the students of that ethnic group would *'be the experts'*, e.g. Famous Black Writers, Poets or Asian leaders.

### **After School Clubs:**

Very big in both the English and Chicago schools. In some schools, teachers had to take a club for 1.5hrs per week for 10 weeks and in other schools, for the whole school year. It was an expectation – not a voluntary activity. Classes usually ran straight after school.

I saw many, many exciting clubs e.g. *rowing, rugby, soccer, darts, trampolining, card games, board games, singing, drama, art and craft, textile, I.C.T., cheerleading, fitness, scouts, guides, trading cards, guitar, dance etc.* Sports clubs were invited in to take lessons and sign up students.

Except for the Charter schools, clubs were not compulsory for students, but most took it up. Teachers, Teachers' Assistants, volunteers and some paid people would all take clubs – usually with small numbers. Teachers loved it as they got to know students form other classes and they only had willing students. Students know that their teacher and staff care about more than just the 3R's - they care about them.

### **Booster Classes;**

Operating during school time on a withdrawal basis using trained teaching assistants and/or teachers. Many booster classes followed a very prescriptive programme, e.g. *Every Child a Reader, Writer or Counter, and special language acquisition programmes*.

All of the visited schools had withdrawal programmes and gathered pre and post achievement data to measure the success of them. Some compared the monetary costs and gains made to ensure they ran with the most cost effective programmes.

### **Mentoring;**

In the Charter schools, every child had an allocated mentor that made contact with them everyday at school. Their mentor was never their class teacher and all support staff were mentors.

Everyone knew one adult really well and knew that they cared. Home contact was made by the mentor when students were sick for a reasonable length of time.

### **Brainstorm sessions;**

In teams to discuss at risk students. Timetabled for teams who met on certain dates on a cyclical basis.

### **Second Language classes;**

Most had several languages available and were formal, structured language sessions, usually three 30 minutes lessons per week with a language specialist. They start learning a second language once they start school. Being bilingual or multilingual is considered the norm.

### **Funding;**

Local areas fund schools in both England and Chicago. The biggest differences in Chicago were that as part of your rates, each Borough Council collected money of which a certain percentage was given for schools in the local Borough.

The amounts ranged from \$7k per student in the poor Charter School District to \$17.5k per head in the wealthy areas. Out of this, they paid all staff etc. The poor areas received far less funding than the wealthy areas and so paid their staff less and were forever seeking outside financial support.

### **Staffing;**

In Charter schools, unions are not allowed and everyone is on an Individual Employment Contract.

Charter schools are able to dismiss incompetent teachers while the Public schools struggle to do this because of the Unions. Charter schools have a higher turnover of staff (30%), due to their successful teachers being poached by wealthier schools where they receive more pay.

### **Teaching Assistants: (a.k.a. Teacher Aides),**

Both countries have them in their younger classes. They are trained, their time can count toward a teaching degree and in the U.K., some are enrolled in university papers which leads them into teaching, and they are treated as professionals. Most schools target their parents to become teaching assistants.

### **Class Sizes;**

Both countries run classes o 1:30, even in the new entrants. They often have much bigger teaching spaces which encourages spread out group work.

### **Rote Learning;**

Both seem to spend considerable time in the early years rote learning, tables, events, history, scientific facts.

I was very impressed by the technical vocabulary young students knew and used in different subjects. Students were saturated with technical and subject specific vocab.

### **Timetable;**

Very structured and is adhered to strictly due to the withdrawal and specialist teaching programmes; *e.g. P.E. which is always taken by specialists.*

I noticed that in the Yrs 4-8 areas, science was timetabled for up to 3 hours per week. Because of its hands on nature, science was a very popular subject. They followed a course book in science. The 3R's were taken daily and were very prescriptive (usually 1 hr/subject/day).

### **Pre Schools;**

All schools had preschools attached (*i.e.4/5yr olds*). In the Charter schools their research showed that by the time they started school, 80% of those who had attended their pre school, were ready for formal learning and became successful learners.

The U.K. schools said a similar thing. In going into these classes, they were very much focused on oral language, rote learning and play.

In Chicago, one Principal told me that only about 15% of the students who had not attended their pre school, were in fact ready for school. Most came ill prepared.

### **Community Involvement;**

- The classes who had the most parents turn up to an event, get to wear mufti, or go off site for a part of the day.
- Service groups like Rotary, Lions etc, collected used books suitable for 5 to 10yr olds and each child received 4 books per year to take home (Free Duffy Books),
- Year, class and school picnics on school grounds in evening or weekends.

### **Dyslexia Students;**

Qualified to extra funding similar to O.R.R.S.

### **Special Needs;**

In the U.S., if the school tried an agreed intervention and it did not work, then they could be classified as special needs and receive some additional funding/help. This was not the case in the U.K.

### **Surveying Parents;**

Carried out as part of parent interviews rather than sending home a survey to be returned.

The Chicago University Charter schools had an average of 94% satisfaction rating from parents.

### **Staff Teams;**

As well as curriculum and learning teams some schools had staff looking at;

- Schoolwide recycling;
- Tech-in charge of all gear and they make sure gets repaired and have a budget;
- Getting parents more involved in school life;
- Before and after school activities;
- Marketing of the school etc.

### **Behaviour;**

All of the schools I visited were restorative in how they dealt with challenging behaviours, rather than being punitive. They all accepted that students will not be perfect and that for most, a punitive approach was unlikely to help change the challenging behaviour.

Believe me, some of the schools I visited had some very, very challenging students yet by and large, they were happy and engaged in learning. Yes they sometimes erupted – but with support, this usually lessened. The students all spoke highly of their school and staff. They enjoyed school. Remember that the Charter Schools open at 7:00am with breakfast and preschool activities and finish their afterschool programmes at 6:00pm, even on Fridays. They maintained very high rates of attendance.

### **Staff;**

The schools cared about their staff and their personal well being. School gyms for staff, staff retreats for P.D. in holidays. The best schools were genuine in their care of staff and showed in – especially from the Principal and Senior management.

### **Conclusions:**

*Successful schools both in N.Z. and overseas do certain things well and it is those things that help minoritised students. They employ effective teachers and support them in their growth, they are not afraid to try different things, they involve their community, they create a warm, caring school environment, they have strong management who are reflective and they continually strive to build their professional capability.*

*They genuinely care and want the best for their students. They don't give up-they never give up.*

*Our system of funding is far fairer, our class sizes are better, our curriculum delivery is, I think, more exciting.*

*Well, lead schools with great teachers, who are sensitive to the needs of students, are what will make a difference.*

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