

SABBATICAL REPORT
BOYS' ACHIEVEMENT IN CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS
TERM 2 2017

Introduction

I was fortunate to be awarded a Teach NZ Principals Sabbatical for Term 2 2017. I spent the first 4 weeks of Term 2 visiting 8 schools in Auckland, Thames Valley, Waikato and Bay of Plenty discussing the topic of boys' achievement with Principals and school staff. My wife and I then went on an overseas trip for 4 weeks. The last 2 weeks of the term have been spent completing my report.

I would like to thank, firstly the Hillcrest High School Board of Trustees for supporting me on my sabbatical. Our Board is integral in supporting our staff, students and community in providing the strategic direction and resourcing to ensure we are delivering a quality education to our students. I would like to especially thank the staff at Hillcrest who continued to guide and run the ship during my absence. In particular Mr Ronan Bass who took over the reigns as Principal, Mrs Debbie Greenhill, who performed the duties as Acting Deputy Principal, Ms Celeste Warner, Dean of Year 10 who undertook duties as Acting Assistant Principal and the remaining two members of the SLT Assistant Principals, Mrs Susan Radford and Mr Dan Franicevic, and also Mrs Kay Ralph, the Principal's PA. The sabbatical also gave Mrs Mary Raleigh an opportunity as Acting Year 10 Dean for the term and Mrs Gregory as Acting Assistant Dean of Year 12 over the same time period. Thank you to you and the rest of the staff for your continued hard work and dedication to Hillcrest High School. A huge thank you to the Principals of the schools I visited and the staff I met at your schools. I have known a number of the Principals for many years and it is most gratifying to see the outstanding work that is taking place in our schools and the commitment of staff in raising the achievement of their students and catering for the well-being and educational needs of our young people.

I was able to gather a considerable amount of information from the schools I visited. I have not recorded all the information obtained within this report (although I have typed notes of every visit) but my report provides a summary of my main findings. In some cases I have made particular reference to schools which have developed specific programmes around student achievement. Readers may like to contact those schools for further details.

The topic of my report was

"I will inquire into the causes of the disparity between girls and boys achievement in co-educational schools, what schools are doing to address the issues and through my inquiry how can I lead changes to boys' achievement at Hillcrest High School"

Why Boys achievement?

There has been much discussion over the years about boys' education, the differences between girls and boys achievement and the achievement of boys in co-educational and single sex schools. This study is not about the merits of single sex boys' schools or co-educational schools, or the differences in the achievement of boys between the two. My interest in boys' achievement has been heightened by my observations at Hillcrest High School over a number of years. At Hillcrest we do have a considerable number of boys achieving at the highest level and some outstanding boys involved in leadership positions and roles of responsibility, but I have made the following observations:

- The gap between girls and boys academic achievement, which is particularly evident in NCEA

- The number of girls on the podium at senior and junior prizegivings and awards ceremonies compared to boys
- Fewer boys in comparison to girls putting themselves forward for leadership roles and positions of responsibility in the school

Prior to becoming Principal of Hillcrest High School in 2003, I had taught at 4 previous co-educational schools (including Hillcrest High in the early 1980s) and found similar issues to exist.

I am firmly committed to co-education and although some students are no doubt suited to single sex schools, I believe that co-educational schools, such as Hillcrest, provide our students with a broad, balanced education in a setting that equips them well for life beyond school.

Hopefully my study and research can provide me with some ideas to implement at Hillcrest which will maximise the opportunities for our boys and close the gap in achievement that currently exist.

The disparity between girls and boys achievement.

The disparity between girls' and boys' achievement has been a source of discussion for some time. In July 2008 The Education Review Office produced a document entitled "Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools" which highlighted the difference in achievement between boys and girls, particularly with NCEA and provided examples of good practice from 10 New Zealand secondary schools which have raised the achievement of boys in their schools. The ERO report noted that several indicators used, including international studies, NCEA data and school leaving data recognise an ongoing gap between boys and girls. The report did point out that there are just as many boys performing well in education as girls and that care should be taken in identifying which boys in your school are not achieving. The report indicated that there are a wide range of possible factors that influence the underachievement of boys. These can include behavioural, biological, cultural, pedagogical and environmental factors. The complexity of these factors have been difficult for researchers to provide definitive reasons for boys' underachievement. A dominant research perspective noted in the report is connected to the issues of male identity and specifically how boys see themselves as learners.

Nathen Mikaere Willis in his work on the adolescent brain, notes that the female frontal cortex (that part of the brain responsible for empathy, controlling emotions and other functions such as literacy), develops more rapidly than males. With slower development of the frontal cortex for males, this can have an effect on their learning and behaviour at school in comparison to females.

Lower male literacy and writing levels is another possible cause of disparity, which can have a significant effect on academic attainment. At Hillcrest High School historical literacy data for Year 8s entering the school at Year 9 indicates that although they both average 4P (asTTle data), the girls are generally about 1 to 2 terms ahead of the boys. The same difference is not evident in numeracy, with similar results recorded for males and females upon entry to Hillcrest. Considerable work is undertaken to prepare students for the literacy and numeracy standards required at Year 11 and beyond.

The 2016 NCEA results for Hillcrest High School show that the girls outperformed boys in every category, which follows the national trend. In comparison with the schools visited on my sabbatical 4 of the schools visited their NCEA pass rates were higher than Hillcrest for 2016, although Hillcrest generally gained a higher percentage of endorsements, including boys. In the remaining schools visited Hillcrest's results were on a par in Level 1 and 2, but below in Level 3 (Level 3 results were

significantly lower in 2016). However Hillcrest achieved higher in endorsements, including boys than those 4 schools. I do acknowledge that it is difficult to compare one school to another with different types of students and courses offered.

Interestingly the disparity between girls' and boys' achievement is not purely confined to NCEA. It was found that in most of the schools in my study, girls dominate the awards at junior and senior prizegiving and girls are more likely to put themselves forward for leadership roles in the school.

Schools visited in my study

I visited the following schools in the first 4 weeks of term 2.

Green Bay High School – Decile 8 roll 1350

Kelston Boys High School – Decile 3 roll 750

Hauraki Plains College – Decile 5 roll 700

Paeroa College – Decile 3 roll 250

Pakuranga College – Decile 7 roll 2250

Howick College - Decile 8 roll 2000

Cambridge High School – Decile 9 roll 1500

Otumoetai College – Decile 7 roll 2015

Raising Achievement – some general features

Although the focus of my study was on boys' achievement in co-educational schools, my discussion with Principals and staff in schools also included discussion on student achievement in general and how schools have introduced initiatives and programmes to raise student achievement, particularly in regard to NCEA. Below is a summary:

- Tracking student achievement is taking place in every school. Data is used to identify those students at risk of not gaining NCEA with staff mentoring students and engaging in timetabled academic conversations around their achievement and goal setting. Some schools are using traffic lighting systems to predict future achievement.
- Schools are increasingly designing courses to target student needs and interests. Good examples of this are at Hauraki Plains College (agriculture, carpentry and building programmes/courses) and Paeroa College (programmes within the community, internally assessed programmes). At both of these schools students are often employed locally on farms or gain apprenticeships within the community. Students also gain valuable work experience while still at school in the local community (STAR and Gateway). Year 11 courses run in semesters, with first half year courses all internals. At Paeroa College and Kelston Boys' High School students have been identified this year who are looking at University study next year and special coaching and mentoring offered to them.
- Senior management are also putting more onus on staff to ensure students pass internals eg if a student fails an internal, questions are asked as to why have they failed and what are staff doing to assist them to succeed.
- Students offered credits in Year 10 – this will give students a head start in NCEA.
- Catch-up and study opportunities made available to students during the Term 3 holidays.

- All staff at Hauraki Plains College are involved in pastoral support (form teachers) including office and admin staff as well as SLT, Deans and HOFs. This means more staff are able to support small groups of students.
- At risk students identified before they enter Level 1. All schools believe they can do this better. Some schools have developed NCEA type measurement/tracking at Year 9 and 10 and Junior Certificates. Most schools are using asTTle, and PAT results as well as behavioural records and attendance data to identify at risk students.
- NZCER “me and my school” used by schools to gather data on staff and student well-being. This information has been useful for identifying issues and assists with planning.
- No study for senior students. Pakuranga College maximises teaching time with every senior student studying 5 NCEA subjects (no students study 6 subjects). Senior classes operate 5 times a week and junior classes 4 times per week.
- All schools undertake inquiry as part of staff professional development and to satisfy teacher registration criteria.
- Most schools have introduced BYOD into their teaching programmes.

Boys’ Achievement – what are schools doing?

All schools visited (7 co-ed and one boys’ school) identify boys achievement as an issue. In three of the schools visited NCEA pass rates are extremely high (in some cases mid 90’s to 100%) and there is little difference between girls and boys achievement, but the number of boys gaining endorsements does not match the high NCEA achievement.

It was suggested to me by Doug Black, Principal of Paeroa College that I visit Kelston BHS as Paeroa College had visited Kelston Boys’ and implemented some of their ideas.

Kelston BHS NCEA results had increased significantly due to a number of factors.

- Installing pride in the school through Pasifika, Kapa haka, cultural events and special cultural assemblies.
- Using sport as a leverage. Sport has always been a big part of the culture of KBHS, so students had to earn the right to represent teams eg attending school and completing assignments
- Constantly reinforcing success with the boys – printing lists on noticeboards showing student success, letters home to parents, making gaining credits competitive (boys love the competitive element)
- Tracking achievement – mentoring, academic conversations
- Targeting boys wishing to go to University and providing support and guidance for them
- Day camps in holidays for extra support
- Changing the focus and timing of parent interviews

Initiatives developed in the co-educational schools

A number of the programmes and initiatives already mentioned have had benefit to the boys as well as the girls, below is a list that focuses on boys’ achievement.

- Paeroa College developed a special leadership programme entitled Te Ara Tapu A Tane, in which boys are selected from Year 9 to 13 to undertake mentoring and leadership development. The boys participate in community events and leadership programmes using resources such as David Galbraith – “Unleashing Greatness” and the book “Legacy” written by James Kerr. The programme has proven to be very successful and popular with the boys.

- At Howick College one of the APs has responsibility for boys' achievement and has incorporated boys' achievement as a component of their strategic and annual plan. HOFs and HODs have been tasked with looking at parts of the curriculum where boys are struggling and how the curriculum and programmes of work can be modified to better suit boys' needs. Programmes need to be more contextualised to meet the needs of boys. At risk boys are identified early in term 1 and contact made with parents. Sport in Education (SiE) programme in which subjects have a sport focus. These classes are dominated by boys who have an interest in sport. SiE has really lifted the engagement of boys.
- One of the DPs at Cambridge has taken boys' achievement under his wing. The school is undertaking a huge push around differentiation and ensuring programmes meet student needs. A concern at the school with Year 10 boys losing their way after Year 9, so the school has created a Year 10 careers centred programme so the students and particularly the boys are making more informed decisions about their Year 11 programme. Boys have often chosen easier NCEA subjects requiring minimal work and perceived to be easier to pass. The school wants to change this and challenge the boys more. The school has begun pairing senior student leaders with Year 10 boys to act as role models. The Principal and DP want to see the boys gaining more endorsements and gaining UE.
- At Hauraki Plains more technically based courses (agriculture, carpentry and building) have really engaged the boys and raised achievement. Many of the boys leave school to work on farms or gain apprenticeships in the community.
- As well as those mentioned above, schools continue to modify courses and programmes of learning to meet the needs of students (and boys) and NCEA has provided the flexibility to do that. All schools spoken to are aware of the need for differentiated programmes and contextualising material to engage and interest the boys. At Pakuranga College Year 12 English offer 3 different programmes (all Achievement Standards) with the Sci Fi course being the most popular courses for the boys. This has certainly raised the engagement and achievement of boys taking Year 12 English.
- Otumoetai College has operated a boys committee for some time and they also have a committee focusing on Maori Achievement, both headed by DPs. A challenge for Otumoetai (which has very similar demographics to Hillcrest) for some years has been the effect of Tauranga Boys College on the boys entered the school, particularly those choosing TBC for sport. This is not dissimilar to Hillcrest.

ERO Report July 2008 – Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools

I have already made reference to this article, but I am including some ideas from schools in the study which have raised the achievement of boys.

- Creating boys classes in Year 9 and Year 10
- Providing more "hands on" Unit Standard courses (we have already seen this in action in a number of schools referred to in my report)
- Expansion of courses and a range of options in Technology, Outdoor Education and Sport/PE (again seen in other schools)
- Focus on teachers professional learning aimed at enhancing teaching practice
- Teachers using self and peer evaluation and increasing student feedback
- Formative assessment works well for boys, can often answer the question "why am I doing this?"
- Increased use of differentiated teaching approaches – again seen in schools in my study

Key strengths found across schools in ERO study

- Leadership – a notable feature was how leadership supported boys’ education, through the board, principal and senior management level through vision and values. Leadership considered the learning needs of the boys, either as part of the entire student group or as a separate group. Senior students provided leadership for junior students. Senior students acted as leaders and mentors.
- School Culture – A school’s culture reflects the quality of the relationships in the school. Certain aspects of a schools culture were considered especially important for the boys. For instance – an emphasis on all-round success, the importance of developing good relationships between staff and students and the extent to which the boys felt they belonged to the school
- Relationships – Strong and positive relationships were integral to developing a successful learning community for boys in all schools in the study
- Engaging boys through rich experiences – A key to boys success is having them attending and engaging in learning while at school. Most schools had their boys engaged in a wide range of activities as well as designing courses that met the boys’ needs.
- Relevant teaching and learning – Relevant teaching and learning was a common strength in the schools. Most schools emphasised the importance of teachers knowing students well and being able to personalise and differentiate lessons accordingly.
- Literacy and numeracy support for boys – Identify at entry level those students who require help with their literacy and/or numeracy. ERO found improving boys writing was critical to success.

What can be done at Hillcrest High School – some thoughts!

- Make boys achievement a priority in our Strategic and Annual Plans
- Promote staff inquiry topics around boys’ achievement
- Looking ways to engage boys in your class (see list)
- Identify what programmes, courses are working well for our boys and which are not – contextualising programmes of learning to meet boys needs
- Ask boys what they want
- Identify at risk boys in the junior school before they get to Level 1
- Identify boys in Year 11 to 13 - look at their programmes of learning, goal setting, mentoring, academic conversations
- Identify those boys with the potential to achieve at the highest level
- Acknowledging the achievements of our students, particularly the boys – tie to RAPID?
- Establishing a Boys’ Achievement Committee

Resources

- ERO publication “Boys Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools” July 2008
- Nathan Mikaere Wallis – The Adolescent Brain. Presentation at SPANZ Conference, Queenstown 2016
- Joseph Driesen – Leading International Educator specialising in Boys Education, based in New Zealand.
- David Galbraith – Sports Psychologist. Worked with some of New Zealand’s most elite athletes, Book entitled “Unleashing Greatness - In Sport and Life Through the Pathway of Greatness”
- James Kerr – “Legacy – 15 Lessons in Leadership”

- Andrew Fuller – Clinical Psychologist who works with many schools and communities in Australia and internationally, specialising in the well-being of young people. Free resources available on his website, including “Teaching Boys” and “Teaching Girls”.
- “Working with Year Ten Boys – Possible Strategies” – Handout from Otumoetai College

Conclusion

This sabbatical has provided me with the opportunity of researching a topic that is important to our school, as well as having some quality time to relax and reflect away from school. My schools visits and the research I have undertaken has provided me with lots of ideas I can take back to Hillcrest. I will be presenting my report to the staff, the board of trustees and to the community. I envisage incorporating some of the ideas I have learnt into the schools planning for next year and beyond. We need to be reminded that although there is disparity between the achievement of our boys and girls, there are still a good number of boys who are achieving at the highest level, and this is certainly the case at Hillcrest. Our challenge with our boys is to identify those who are under achieving and look at the reasons why and then implement programmes or change our practices to meet their needs. A focus on boys’ achievement also raises the question of those girls who are also underachieving and we what we can do to raise their achievement.

Kelvin Whiting

Principal

Hillcrest High School

July 2017