

New Zealand  
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Sabbatical Report  
By  
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Sabbatical Report from Chris Dibben:

Title: Professional Learning Inquiry Focus:

What and how do early childhood centres, services and agencies identify and actively provide support and intervention for those tamariki from ages 0 to 5 and whanau who could be at risk in their engagement and learning before they enter primary school.

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Acknowledgements:

NZ Teachers Study Awards Since thanks and appreciation to the New Zealand Principal and Teachers Study Awards personnel for allowing me to have the time to reflect and refresh over term 3 2018 and to research and investigate the effective practices that identify and support our high needs tamariki aged 0 - 5 before entering Primary Schools/Kura..  
Tawhero School Board of Trustees, Staff and Community for their on going and positive support to ensure we have a community school where there is an atmosphere of respect and positive relationships and that each child succeeds and achieves in a positive learning environment.

Purpose:

The aim of the study is to investigate and share the knowledge, skills and effective practices of successful and effective leaders in early childhood centres, services and agencies that identify and provide support for those tamariki from 0 - 5 years of age who are at risk in their engagement and learning before they enter primary school.

Then we can share these practices with others to ensure our high needs tamariki have the best opportunities to engage with their learning and others that ultimately leads to improving student achievement.

Background and Rationale:

Background Information on Tawhero School:

Tawhero School is decile one school in Whanganui. I have the pleasure of being the tumuaki at Tawhero School since October 2001. We have had an interesting journey with lots of successes and improvements, all for the benefit of our tamariki, staff and parents. We are celebrating having an ERO review in August 2016 and we look forward to our next review in 2019 to receive confirmation of good practice but also to some next step ideas to continue our journey of better educational outcomes for our taonga/tamariki.

Tawhero School has implemented a range of programmes designed to improve student engagement and achievement. Tawhero School is also a Positive Behaviour for Learning School and we have participated in the Understanding Behaviour Responding Safely PLD all with amazing success. Children and staff now effectively and more engaged in learning and teaching, with the data showing a major decrease in negative and minor issues for students and staff. After considerable effort a positive and respectful learning environment exists for all.

We are also been actively involved in UBRS Understanding Behaviour Responding Safely with the support of the ME learning Support staff. Our whole team of teachers, support staff, clerical and caretaking team all attended professional learning inservice programme and this has been ongoing throughout 2018.

Tawhero School has the privilege of also being the lead school for RTL B Cluster 25 where we are now focusing on building capability and capacity in our team to ensure we best meet the needs of referred students, teachers and schools in our area.

Tawhero School is also a satellite school for students with severe and extremely high needs, as well as having ORRS students mainstreamed throughout the kura.

Tawhero School also has a preschool education programme available. There is a Pasifika - Born and Raised Early Childhood Centre on site. We also have a 0 -5 playgroup under Plunket banner operating four mornings a week. This playgroup is free and caters for the those whanau who have limited financial means to attend other early childhood centres. We also offer a Mini Movers Playgroup operating every Thursday morning for preschoolers.

Tawhero School is also providing learning opportunities for parents and community members. In association with Whanganui Learning Centre we have been providing Literacy and learning programmes based upon parents needs at Tawhero during the school day. We are also providing a Mums with pre-schoolers programme focusing on sharing how young children learn, what and how we teach their children, and also develop programmes based upon the mums needs as well. We have also been providing programmes for effective parenting, including Incredible Years, All About Me... and regular Monday learning sessions for parents about cooking, pastimes, relationships building etc in our community room.

We are also working with our parents and Community into sharing the programme Talking Matters and raising awareness of the powerful use of verbal communication with our children and how parents can lead the way in implementing this programme.

This research was deemed necessary for these early childhood tamariki as we have steadily had an increase of high needs students entering the school without identification and or support. This then creates a huge gap in their learning and achievements in comparison to their peers and these high needs students fall behind instantly.

We are very much in the mindset that if we can make a positive difference and identify and provide support to our 0 -5 year olds in the first 1000 days... we can make a huge difference and set the child onto a successful and positive learning journey.

It was always the intention that the information collated in this research would contribute to the students who live in our community and are likely to attend Tawhero School. We feel if we can have better identification systems and an effective process to support students who present with high needs from the ages 0 - 5, then we can ensure Tawhero School will be an even more effective learning environment for the benefit of our students.

A large amount of my time was spent researching the wide and varied information and readings prior to deciding upon worthy and valuable leaders in early childhood education who have put systems in place to best support these 0-5 year olds and also discussing with principals of primary schools if

there is a need for a more effective identification and support process for our 0 -5 year old high needs students.

Programme Outline:

The study included:

- Survey and visit primary schools to see if they have concerns and issues around the level of 5 year old students entering their school that have high special needs and are at risk in their learning.
- Preplanning and research of current effective identification and interventions processes/interventions/strategies and systems for at risk children aged 0 – 5 years and their whanau/families.
- Survey, visit, interview and discuss with early childhood centres, agencies and services etc how they identify and support children years 0 – 5 at risk and what interventions and resources are available to support these students before they enter primary school.
- Collating the findings into a report to share with Principals so they can reduce or eliminate the high needs these preschool children had so they can enter primary school with the support, skills and resources to actively interact , engage, learn and achieve similar to their peers .

Information from Early Childhood Centres and Primary Schools

From the conversations and information received there is evidence that students are entering our Primary Schools with high needs and have not previously been identified and inturn no support has been offered to support these students and their whanau.

It must be mentioned that there are some early childhood students who have been identified and supported prior to entering primary school.

From the information received the high needs behaviours being exhibited from 5 year olds entering primary schools and that have not been previously identified include:

- \* Limited verbal communication and or interaction with others
- \* Limited or no social skills and interactions with peers
- \* Antisocial behaviours - verbally abusive and physically abusive to other students and adults
- \* Withdrawn
- \* Non engaging in learning
- \* Not interacting with others
- \* Defiant and non compliant
- \* Aggressive
- \* Unsafe by running away
- \* .....

Students who have been identified have usually been identified by Early Childhood educators and referrals sent to MOE Learning Support Early Childhood Advisors . When these referrals have been completed there has been identification of a need to acquire further support for that child. This may initially require a medical assessment to identify a medical need that has not previously been identified and then a plan is put place to best meet this needs. On many occasions this requires a Pediatrician assessment and report and ongoing checkups and hui to ensure the child is receiving the best possible support to enter primary school. When this takes place there is often a transition process including all agencies and personnel that can assist and make a positive difference for that child.

On some occasions through the identification process by the early childhood educators and their referrals support is sometimes offered to the whanau. These environmental issues also require specialised support. This may include agencies that offer parenting programmes and in home support to assist the parents to manage and change behaviours of the child. There are a larger number of students entering primary school at 5 - 6 years of age - that have a variety of high needs and have not been identified or referred for support. These students are then placed behind the learning levels of other students and they fall behind academically, socially and emotionally compared to their peers which then disadvantages these students in their learning journey.

When these students are soon identified at primary school, it usually common practice to action referrals to either the CHN Child Health Nurse, SWIS Social Worker in Schools, RTLB - Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour; SELS Special Education Learning Support and or any Family Support Service. At times and certain circumstances referrals can also be made to the Children's' Team and /or Oranga Tamariki as there may be evidence and concerns around a child's safety in the home environment.

In these instances when a specific referral has been made an action plan is co constructed with the whanau and agencies/personnel involved to bring about positive change for the child and whanau. This begins a process of support including the appropriate professional involvement to ensure progress is made. The plan is monitored and with regular checkpoints, check-ins and hui... to ensure the expected outcomes can be achieved.

Barriers that could contribute to non identification in the 0 to 5 years of age is that :

- \* The child does not attend any early child centre, play group or kohanga reo.
- \* The child has enrolled at an early childhood centre but not regularly attend. Officially this is perceived as the child has attended an ECC and the child's needs have not been referred for support. More importantly it reflects that the teachers/educators at Early Childhood Centres have not observed or had enough time to be with the child to identify their needs.
- \* There may cultural based understandings that since the child is young they will learn the appropriate behaviours etc as they continue to attend their Early Childhood centre.

- \* Identifying and discussing with parents/whanau that their child has high needs may create difficulty and an issue .
- \* Identifying a high need may create a perception that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Learning Centre.
- \* There may be other factors which may contribute to the no identification of high needs students but the aforementioned barriers seemed to predominate the information received.
- \* Other than the MOE Learning Support for Early Childhood students who do educators refer to.

#### Impact of these Non - Identified Students with High Needs:

The most important impact of not identifying these students from 0 -5 years of age is that there is a delay in meeting their high needs and this negatively creates a huge disadvantage to them in their learning and other aspects of their life. This can also create a further gap and delay in their learning in comparison to their peers and as time passes their self esteem and self perception can be affected. This in turn can create other negative issues for these students, their interactions with their peers and teachers. This delay in meeting their high needs can also impact negatively on other students in their classroom and their learning and their teacher teaching, as the child's high needs may predominate the learning environment and disrupt learning and teaching situations.

#### Impact of Identifying Students with High Needs:

If the child high needs were met an effective plan would be put in place, with specific outcomes and identifying the person/agency with their specific responsibility. The plan would be monitored to ensure the actions are completed with the intention to best meet the students high needs by accessing the appropriate resources and meeting the timelines to ensure the expected outcomes are achieved. Depending upon the students needs a plan may need to accompany the child for an unlimited period of time. The success of the plans and their actions will dictate the timeframes for support.

The child then enters school with a plan of support, a better transition process so a smooth transfer for school is made stress free for the child and the whanau. The school has the knowledge of the child's and can put in place further support and assistance to increase the opportunity for the child to access learning.

The parents/whanau and school create a positive partnership to wrap around the child to ensure the child is successful and achieve in the primary school environment. This transparent process builds a positive relations and trust and focuses on the child and to achieve the best outcomes for the child.

Actions to improve Identification and referrals for Children aged 0 - 5. It is imperative that any child that displays high needs has been referred to an appropriate agency to share these high needs and the associated concerns so a collaborative team of professionals along with the whanau can co construct a plan to effectively meet the needs of the student.

Education to Educators of students from 0 - 5 years of age needs to be shared so they have an understanding of what behaviours/needs to be referred and the process they can implement to refer these high needs students.

In our RTLB Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour, as we Tawhero School are the Lead school for Cluster 25, in association with the MOE and their approval, our RTLB will be accepting referrals from Early Childhood centres and educators, and even parents/whanau where they can refer students from 3 years of age for RTLB support, assistance and guidance. Educators in Early Childhood centres need more resources/agencies/process to identify and refer students to MOE Learning Support Early Intervention and RTLB . This unknown creates a delay in meeting the students needs and can create issues for the child, teacher, other students and school when these students enter their primary school.

Promotion activities like Talking Matters which promotes the increase of Oral Language and support parents and whanau with resources and support that promote the use of oral language as a means of improving the learning and achievement of students.

#### Conclusions:

The earlier a child's high needs can be identified and met, or a plan put in place to meet their needs, this can reduce or even eliminate further/future issues for the child as they enter primary school and during their learning journey in the New Zealand Education system.

All students with high needs aged 0 - 5 need to be referred so an action plan can be implemented with the whanau to access the appropriate resources to ensure their child's /whanau needs are met.

The process for identification and referral needs to be formalised and shared with all Educators and parents/whanau of all students aged 0 - 5. This empowers all and improves the outcomes for every child.

The RTLB service should be available to students from 0 - 5 years of age. The earlier the identification and support the greater the opportunity for change, success and achievement for students who are at risk in their engagement and learning when they enter primary school.

Early identification and the provision of appropriate resources and support is the catalyst for the greatest positive changes for the student and whanau.

The whanau/family need to be actively participating and implementing the programme action plan strategies to ensure the best outcomes for the child are met.

The focus on a multi agency active involvement process is paramount to ensure all resources are access to best support student, kua and whanau needs.

#### References

- \* Primary School Principals
- \* Early Childhood Educators
- \* RTLB - Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour
- \* MOE Learning Support
- \* Parents and whanau
- \* Students
- \* Agencies for Whanau, Parents and Children.