STUDENT LED REPORTING
Principal Sabbatical Report
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Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank the Trentham School Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical application. The time to rest, re-energise, reflect, and investigate an area of interest has been much appreciated by me.

I would particularly like to thank Bernie Olliver, who led our school superbly in my absence from school. Thanks also to the Leadership team and my wonderful staff for supporting Bernie and carrying on with their roles as usual.

Thanks to the schools, leaders and Principals that gave their time so graciously to share their practice with me. I am extremely appreciative and thankful for their openness and willingness to share.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Education for providing the principal sabbatical scheme. This has been a wonderful opportunity to spend time away from the busy life at school to explore an area of interest which will benefit my school.

Purpose

To investigate the development of student-led reporting practices and the advantages to students and whanau, particularly Maori and Pasifika. To research the benefits student-led reporting has on engagement and identify the steps that are successful in developing an effective model for a diverse learning community.

Background

Two years ago Trentham School, along with all other primary and intermediate schools in Upper Hutt, identified student engagement as an area requiring significant attention. We felt that many of our students were present at school, completing tasks, but not really fully engaging in the learning. We identified increasing learner agency and collaborative teaching as key practices needed for the students of Upper Hutt.

At Trentham School students are now beginning to talk more about their learning - what they know, what they still need to learn and why, how they learn best - but most teachers continue to have a lead role at 3 way conferences. Many teachers find it difficult to allow students to take the leading role as they feel they're not ready or able to, particularly in the junior classes. With the work we are doing in collaborative teaching, I'm also interested to know how we could organise student-led reporting in collaborative learning environments.

Research by Epstein and Bastiani (1988) shows that parental involvement in schools and classrooms has a positive impact on children's learning. 3 Way Conferences at Trentham School has an 85% average parent attendance rate. Attendance of Maori parents is lower with 73%. This needs to be increased. Parents need to engage with school and be fully aware of their child's learning so they can support at home. Are student-led conferences effective in getting whanau involved in their children's learning?

Feedback from teachers on our current model is mostly positive, with teachers enjoying the time to talk with parents about their children's learning. The 15 minutes allocated per conference has sometimes felt too long for some students and not long enough for others. Parents too have commented that they feel the meetings are rushed. Over the last couple of years, Year 5/6 students have taken a greater lead in sharing their learning with parents. Students have prepared a presentation to share which most parents have valued. Feedback from parents is that although they like hearing their child talk about their learning, they also like to hear from the teacher. Parents would also like to see examples of work to show the learning and the progress made. I wonder if there is a better way of carrying out our learning meetings to ensure they better meet the needs of students and parents.

Findings

A student-led conference is simply a meeting with parents led by the student. Students share samples of work, discuss what they have learned and the progress they've made, and they may undertake some activities with their parents to show their learning. Typically, several conferences are conducted simultaneously in a space with family groups seated far enough apart to allow for privacy. The teacher's role during a conference is that of a facilitator. The teacher roves and supports students when required, makes pertinent comments and answers any questions.

The following table highlights the differences between the traditional model of conferences with the student-led approach.

Traditional	vs	Student-Led
- Teacher driven - Short meeting time - One family per time slot - Limited parent involvement - Focus tends to be on sharing academic, social and behaviour skills - Assessment data shared at the meeting by the teacher - Goal setting at the meeting - Teacher responsibility		- Student driven - Longer meeting time - Multiple families per time slot - Greater parent involvement - Focus tends to be on sharing and celebrating learning and progress - Samples of work selected and shared by the student - Goals shared and discussed - Student accountability and responsibility

The main purposes of student-led conferences are to celebrate a child's learning, show growth over time, and provide parents with a better insight and understanding of their child's learning.

It's important to remind ourselves of the purpose of reporting to parents. TKI Assessment Online notes the following two key reasons for reporting to parents.
- Parents and whānau are key stakeholders in education and as such they expect meaningful information about their child's progress and achievement in relation to learning entitlements set out in the New Zealand Curriculum.
- Parents, families, whānau, and wider community have a valuable role to play in supporting their children's learning at and beyond school.

Student-led conferences align with these purposes and reflects the intent of the New Zealand Curriculum. Having students actively involved in the learning and reporting process is consistent with the characteristics of effective assessment in the NZC. Preparing students for learning in the 21st century requires teachers to allow students be agentic and take responsibility of their own learning, and what better way than through sharing their learning with whanau.

From my professional reading and talking to teachers and principals, I've identified that student-led conferences have the following benefits.

- Increase in student achievement. Hattie's (2009) revised list of the most effective influences on student achievement identifies student self-reporting as the most significant indicator linked to raised student achievement. Student-led conferences provide an opportunity to develop students' ability to talk about their learning and their progress. When students discuss their work with someone else they have to "think about thinking" and then articulate what they have learned. Black & William (1998) comment, "the process of students reflecting on their learning, through effective questioning that promotes the articulation of student thinking, is integral to classroom assessment practices that enhance student learning".

- Students, parents and the teacher are all active participants in the learning conference. All parties have a role to play to ensure the success of the conference. The school plays an important part here to ensure that each party fully understands their role. With clear guidelines and support, all participants will benefit.

- Encourages students to be self managing. It is the responsibility of the student, with teacher support, to run the meeting. Students have ownership in selecting the samples of work to share, they reflect on their learning to ensure they're prepared and ready to share this with their parents. In order for students to be able to articulate their

thoughts about their learning, they must be actively involved in the process of learning.

- Students feel proud and gain great satisfaction out of sharing their work with parents. Schools visited and surveyed stated that their students got a lot out of having to share their work with parents, and the confidence to do this increased. Parents were often surprised to see how confident their child was talking about their learning.

- Celebration of student learning. Schools talked about conferences being an opportunity to celebrate the learning a student shares and the progress they have made. Hebert (1998) says that "learning is worth celebrating, and children can be competent participants in that celebration". Some schools actually call their meetings *Student-Led Celebrations* or *Celebrations of Learning*.

- Provide an authentic opportunity for children to talk about their learning. Having an audience to share their work with and talk about their learning, provides a clear purpose for students. "… if we believe that students build their knowledge by communicating what they know then providing an opportunity for the students to tell their family what they know can significantly assist with that learning" (Absolum, 2006). Some schools called their conferences *Student-Led Learning Conversations,* which emphasised the focus on the talking between all parties.

- Students learn from each other. When multiple families are in the room together and more than one child is sharing in a time slot, students are able to listen and learn from one another. Schools commented that this worked well and supported those students who were less able or confident.

- For students who have English as a second language, student-led conferences can be beneficial. Research shows that there is an increase in attendance of non-English speaking families. Students can speak to their parents in their native language and can serve as a translator if necessary. This puts parents at ease and gives them a greater understanding of their child's learning.

- Increased parent attendance. Much of the research undertaken has shown a significant increase in parent attendance rates at conferences. Research undertaken by Cherie Taylor-Patel (2011) saw that "parents found the process less intimidating and more informative". Having multiple families in the room seems to provide a more informal setting, which appeals to many parents and encourages attendance and involvement.

- Greater parent understanding. Student-led conferences allow parents to understand aspects of their child's learning more clearly. "When students report directly to parents, information is communicated in a form everyone can understand and use",

Bailey & Guskey (2001). Information provided by children is often jargon-free and therefore, easier for parents to understand. Parents also come away with a clearer understanding of learning goals and how they can help their child at home.

- Parents become more involved in the learning process. An opportunity for parents to see the work undertaken and what their children have been learning in more detail, gives insight into what learning has taken place in class. The Seesaw app is beginning to do this in schools, but a face to face discussion about a piece of work/learning can go to a much deeper level.

- Teacher preparation. This can be seen as a benefit and a challenge. Teachers themselves don't need to do a lot of preparation outside of class, prior to conferences. The students drive the meeting so teachers need to ensure they are prepared. This gets done during class time. Fewer hours are spent by teachers preparing for these in their own time.

- Reduced number of meetings. Rather than seeing only one family in a 15 minute time slot, between four to six families can be seen comfortably during one half hour time slot. This model could allow all families to be seen in one afternoon and evening. Conferences at my school currently run over two afternoons and evenings, resulting in one or two late nights for teachers and students.

Moving away from the traditional model of student conferences to a student-led approach, is not always smooth sailing and does come with the following challenges to consider.

- Parents unclear on the purpose of student-led conferences. Feedback from some schools was that parents still came to conferences expecting to hear from the teacher. Some also wanted to discuss concerns with the teacher. This is a significant shift for teachers and parents to get used to, as the teacher has always been considered the leader in a student/parent meeting. The purpose and the roles need to be clearly communicated so parents are fully aware of why students are leading these meetings.

- It can be problematic when parents do not attend their child's conference. Students have worked hard to prepare for their meeting and may be disappointed when they are unable to share their learning. The schools I spoke to have considered this and many have support staff or leaders in the school attend the conference with the child to allow them to share.

- Teacher and student preparation. This appears to be the greatest challenge. "The preparation phase of student-led conferences is the most important and also the most difficult", Bailey & Guskey (2001). Some parents and teachers really believe that students aren't capable of reporting to parents about their learning. A lot of work

needs to be done prior to enable students to do this well. Many schools commented that preparation time can be a challenge for teachers. Students need to know their learning journey and be able to articulate it, with the support of their teacher if needed. This will take work and commitment in the classroom, but is essential if student-led conferences are to be successful. Organisation is the key and the process must be part of the curriculum so it's not seen as an extra on top of an already busy timetable.

It was interesting to find out how students with special needs and very young students managed to lead their conference. Bailey & Guskey (2001) state that "student-led conferences provide a chance for students who routinely experience classroom failure or difficulties to take charge and to talk about what they know best - themselves!" Careful preparation and extra practise and role-playing may be required for these students, along with conference organisers to support them through their meeting.
Minor adaptations can be made for young students. A shortened conference time may be necessary, i.e. 20 minutes. Conference organisers with picture cues are easier for young students to follow and written directions for parents to cue children about the tasks they need to complete. Specific learning center activities designed for families work well for student-led conferences with young children. Students can lead their parents through a series of typical classroom activities to highlight the learning taking place. Given the right support, all students are capable of sharing their learning with their parents.

Ka Hikitia (2013) states that "stakeholders must form productive partnerships where there is an ongoing exchange of knowledge and information, and where everybody contributes to achieving the goals. A productive partnership starts with the understanding that Māori children and students are connected to whānau and should not be viewed or treated as separate, isolated or disconnected. Parents and whānau must be involved in conversations about their children and their learning".

Engagement of Maori and Pasifika whanau at conferences can be irregular. Although much of the professional reading I've undertaken doesn't specify an increase in engagement of Maori and Pasifika parents, it does highlight the increase in parent attendance in general. ERO's findings (2008) on home-school engagement found that "Māori parents and whānau appreciated opportunities to celebrate their child's success and to have discussions about what and how well they were learning. Seeing their child progress over time was very important to them". The schools I surveyed or visited that were of high Maori and Pasifika roll numbers, did mention the positive turn out of parents at student-led conferences. The more informal style with multiple conferences taking place was less daunting and was appreciated by whanau. Student-led conferences can be a great avenue to increase Maori and Pasifika parent engagement.

Summary & Next Steps

It's clear to me that student-led reporting is an essential component of the reporting to parents process. The benefits to students and parents far out way the challenges.

Student-led conferences support our commitment to increasing learner agency and is a natural next step in the process. If we are wanting our students to drive their own learning, they need to be fully involved in reporting to parents. Teachers are supporting their students to understand themselves as learners, know where they are at with their learning, and what they need to do next. Students are the best people to share this with their parents.

It's important to remember that moving from a traditional model of conferences to student-led is not simple and there is a great deal that needs to take place in the classroom to ensure students are ready to take on this responsibility. Hackmann (1997) states that "it cannot be assumed that students possess the self confidence and the organisational and communication skills necessary to lead a successful conference without the support of teachers". Student-led conferencing needs to align with the school's vision and strategic intent, school wide assessment, professional learning and teaching pedagogy. This will ensure conferences are successful and both students and parents have their needs met. "The role of the school and teacher should be to manage the teaching and learning environment to maximise active and self directed learning in teaching and learning experiences and to assist the development of these attributes in students", (Absolum, 2006).

There is also a lot that needs to be done to educate parents prior to implementing student-led conferences. Parents need to be fully informed on the purpose of these conferences and the role they play. It is a significant shift in mindset and parents need to be supported through this change so they can understand and see the benefits.

Multiple student-led conferences conducted simultaneously have been successfully implemented at all year levels and in a variety of school settings. It may just look different at each level. Many of the schools I visited expected all their students to run their conference, from Year 1-8. How these were organised varied from school to school and from year to year. It depended on the students and the community.

Student-led reporting in collaborative learning environments is still very new to schools and some are only just trialing various approaches now. One school visited was trialing scheduling conferences across a team of 2-3 classes. All teachers were available to groups of students and parents across the rooms. This was useful when students went to different teachers for various learning times. It provided parents with the opportunity to talk to these teachers if needed.

In order for student-led conferences to be successful I will be considering the following when implementing them in my school:

1. The purpose of these conferences needs to be clearly communicated. This will help to establish buy-in. Parents and teachers need to understand why there is a move to this model and they need to know the benefits to students and to themselves. Parents also need to understand that there will be other families in the room at the same time.

2. Teachers, students and parents all need to be clear on the roles they are undertaking.
   a. Students - be prepared to share their work, reflect on their learning and talk about this with parents
   b. Parents - to listen, question, provide encouragement and praise to their child
   c. Teachers - support students to prepare for conferences, be a guide and offer support where necessary

3. Teachers need to be prepared to support and facilitate student-led conferences. Professional learning and on-going support needs to be part of the school process. Student-led conferences needs to be included in the induction of new teachers so they understand the purpose, their role and the process.

4. Teachers need to "engage with assessment information, to inform their teaching programmes and to inform students about their progress and achievement", Cherie Taylor-Patel (2011). Teachers also need to support students to reflect deeply on their learning. They need to model what reflection looks like, sounds like, and then talk through thoughts to provide an example to students about how you reflect. Time for reflection should be ongoing practice in regular lesson times. This will help students make connections to prior knowledge and learn new concepts well.

5. Time needs to be allocated prior to conferences, for students to prepare. This entails the selection of work samples, reflection on their learning, social skills and behaviour, and role-play of student-led conferences. Role play helps to ease students' minds as they'll know the process and feel less anxious about their role. Conference organisers and templates are useful for students and teachers to assist with preparation and can be developed by the school for each year level to ensure consistency of expectations.

6. Time for parents to meet with teachers, if they require it, should be included in the organisation. Feedback from schools and parents clearly states they want an opportunity to talk to the teacher. This could be made available in the conference time slot.

7. The introduction of student-led conferences will require a scaffolded implementation approach across the year levels. As practice becomes embedded, the need for scaffolding in the middle and senior year levels will decrease.

8. Student-led conferences is a time for parents to focus on their child. Siblings can be a distraction and schools need to consider how to manage this. Child care could be provided so siblings can be supervised in another room while parents attend their conference. Or teachers could have games, drawing or other fun activities available in the room for siblings to undertake.

9. Regular review of the school process needs to be undertaken, collecting student, parent and teacher voice, to ensure the needs are being met of all parties.

Student-led conferences are an effective method of reporting to parents. I look forward to sharing my findings with my school community and implementing a model which strengthens our current reporting process

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