

## **Sabbatical Report Term III 2018**

*A student achievement project looking at the range of strategies used by intermediate and secondary schools to accelerate the learning of students who are at risk of underachieving – particularly, but not exclusively, Maori and Pasifika students.*

Karen Russell, Deputy Principal Northcote College

## **Acknowledgements**

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- Lisa Morresey Principal Mt Maunganui Intermediate School who is currently seconded to University of Auckland Centre for Educational Leadership (UACEL)
- Paul McKinley Principal Glenfield College and Anne Kabalin Deputy Principal Glenfield College
- Tom Webb Principal Mangere College
- Tina Filipo Deputy Principal Howick College
- Shameen Hayat Deputy Principal Mt Albert Grammar School

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## **Executive Summary**

This report is a study of the range of approaches used by intermediate and secondary schools to accelerate the learning of students who are at risk of underachieving – particularly, but not exclusively, Maori and Pasifika students.

A particular focus of the study was to identify effective and sustainable school-wide practices that accelerate the progress of student achievement.

The study found a shared awareness amongst senior educators that engagement in and ownership of learning is built on a foundation of respect within a learning community that embodies cultural connectedness.

Teacher disposition and mindset is identified as critical in engaging students in their learning journey and schools are utilising university projects and school-based professional learning time to build teacher capacity to know their learners.

The use of data to measure value added is less standardised in the secondary context than in intermediate schools and this is due in part to the definition of successful outcomes. In the secondary schools visited these are identified as much by students embarking on positive meaningful pathways beyond school as by academic attainment.

Whether deliberately or for reasons of manageability, systematic structural approaches to student attainment goals, used in the larger senior secondary schools visited, place responsibility with the student to set goals and track their own achievement. This reflects a 21<sup>st</sup> Century model that is consistent with the intention to develop actively involved lifelong learners.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify effective and sustainable practices in New Zealand intermediate and secondary schools that accelerate the learning of students who present as performing below the expected attainment level.

## **Background and Rationale**

I am professionally committed to finding and sharing sustainable practices that will enable priority learners to engage in learning and achieve academic success. This sabbatical study has emerged from educational research as well as goals, initiatives and strategies experienced at Northcote College.

This project was triggered by the work of the Northcote Community of Learning on achievement and transitions and my involvement in the Ministry of Education initiative; Achievement Retentions and Transitions (ART) Programme that responded to the Better Public Service Target 2013 aimed at ensuring 85% of all 18 year olds achieved a minimum of Level 2 NCEA or equivalent qualification by 2017. At Northcote College this ART mentoring programme was adapted to include student selection of mentors and this relationship-based approach, while very successful, limited the number of students who could potentially benefit from the programme.

In most cases Maori and Pasifika students participating in the ART programme at Northcote College experienced significant success both academically and in terms of efficacy and pathways beyond school. I initially set out with the intention of seeking ways to improve and extend the scope of the existing mentoring programme to maintain a focus on learning and benefit a greater number of students without undue additional teacher workload.

The various student achievement Teaching as Inquiry projects undertaken by Northcote College teachers since 2011 have served to reinforce the importance of measurable outcomes to answer the important question; 'How do we know we are making a difference?'

Qualitative data suggests that the most successful outcomes for individual students within the Northcote College ART programme have included student engagement in learning through a combination of more of the following: culturally responsive practice, student agency, goal setting and tracking, collaborative communication with whanau, ongoing encouragement and celebration of success.

## Further Context

Alongside the ART programme a learning pilot began at Northcote College in 2014 based on the My Learning[i] approach which aims to increase student engagement and achievement through pedagogical practices used in the primary context. This approach, which is founded on student understanding and ownership of their own learning, had proved effective at Willow Park Primary School and was adopted by Northcote Intermediate in response to parent requests. Northcote College pilot teachers planned collaboratively across English, Science and Social Studies within the constraints of a traditional secondary school timetable. While the attainment results over the 4 year pilot were positive, an equally significant outcome was the professional collaboration across faculties and the resulting increased and shared knowledge of each learner.

Another initiative, the Home and School Partnership Project[ii] which initially involved Northcote College, Mt Roskill Grammar School and Otahuhu College, began in 2016 and has worked to strengthen the school's commitment to staff developing educationally powerful connections and relationships with parents, families and whanau. By involving all teachers of junior English and Mathematics the scope of this project has the potential to make an even greater impact on the achievement and engagement of all students.

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[i] My Learning is 'a conglomeration of e-learning, formative assessment practices and self-directed learning theory' developed by Emma Winder-Kingston through practice in a primary context.

[ii] Home and School Partnership Project is a Teacher Led Innovation Fund (TLIF) project aimed at engaging parents effectively in student learning.

## Methodology - activities undertaken

The project involved visiting individual schools selected because they provide experience of a range of approaches to accelerating the achievement of students who arrive with achievement levels below that expected of the cohort. Many, but not all, of those students identify as Maori and/or Pasifika.

Contact was made with principals by email. The email stated that the intention would be to look at the range of strategies used by intermediate and secondary schools to accelerate the learning of students who are at risk of underachieving – particularly, but not exclusively, Maori and Pasifika students. The email also indicated that through this project, I would seek to identify what approaches are working and what is sustainable.

Interviews were conducted with:

- Ben Kelsey Principal Northcote Intermediate School and Rebecca Spurdle Deputy Principal Northcote Intermediate School
- Lisa Morreseay Principal Mt Maunganui Intermediate School who is currently seconded to University of Auckland Centre for Educational Leadership (UACEL)
- Paul McKinley Principal Glenfield College and Anne Kabalin Deputy Principal Glenfield College
- Tom Webb Principal Mangere College
- Tina Filipo Deputy Principal Howick College
- Shameen Hayat Deputy Principal Mt Albert Grammar School

Interviews were based on the following questions:

- What is your school's definition of successful outcomes for students? (*achievement, engagement, pathways beyond school, other*)
- To what extent is this vision shared by teachers?
- What do you consider to be best measures your success as a school?
- How much importance does your school place on students understanding their own identity/background – cultural locatedness?
- Are teachers practising culturally responsive teaching?  
*How do you facilitate this and how do you know it is happening?*

- How would you describe the home-school partnerships at your school and the extent to which there are conversations around learning between home and school?
- Are you seeing individual students with variable achievement between subjects?  
*How does this come to light and do you see this as an issue?*
- To what extent do students have multi-level programmes?
- Is integrated curriculum or student agency evident in your school's approach to teaching and learning and do you see this as something worth building?
- Could you describe your view of the relationship between the principles and values of the NZC and NCEA credits.
- Is there deliberate inclusion of key competencies in teaching programmes (and what levels)?
- Is there streaming in any form at this school? (*examples*)
- Is there any form of compulsory learning in Years 9 and 10 to build the foundations for learner capacity and confidence in senior study?
- Specific strategies aimed at those who are at risk of underachieving
- When students arrive here and as they progress through the secondary, how do you know who is at risk of underachieving?
- What strategies and interventions do you use to accelerate individual student progress?
- Are they sustainable?
- How is progress tracked?
- Which strategies have proved to be successful in accelerating student achievement and how do you know?

Notes were taken during each visit. These notes were reviewed after the visit. Answers to the questions were considered, ideas and patterns noted.

## Findings

Each interview confirmed a shared professional passion for student success. All of the schools in the sample described approaches that acknowledge the importance of positive relationships and cultural connectedness.

*“If students can position themselves in their own language and cultural identity that will provide the confidence and self worth needed to go forward into unfamiliar contexts.”*

*Tom Webb Principal Mangere College*

Student engagement in learning was a shared priority across all schools included in this study and a growing emphasis placed on teaching as inquiry was embedded within teacher performance review suggesting acknowledgement of the need for teachers to also be engaged in learning.

As anticipated the most significant difference between the intermediate and secondary schools in this sample was the teaching team approach which is more common to the primary school model. It also became clear that there are significant challenges for an intermediate school when half of the cohort changes every year as Year 8 students move to a secondary school and Year 7 students arrive from their primary school.

In the secondary schools visited, there was, to an extent, a disconnect between the junior (Years 9 and 10) and senior (Years 11- 13) programme of learning due mainly to the necessary focus on a national qualification (NCEA)[i] and pathways beyond school. Each of the secondary schools referred to both academic and ‘soft skills’ and the importance of developing young people who would be being contributing members of society. Central to this was the concept of cultural locatedness.

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[i] ‘NCEA is the national qualification for secondary school students in New Zealand. Since its introduction in 2002, NCEA has been used by many schools as a framework, not only for assessment, but to provide the content of teaching and learning at senior levels. Findings from ERO reports and research information from a variety of agencies indicate that in the senior school (Years 11+) the majority of school and wharekura focus largely on subject specific skills and knowledge. Generally schools’ senior curricula do not clearly demonstrate the relationship between the principles values and key competencies of NZC and programmes of teaching and learning that contribute to the achievement of NCEA.’ *What Drives Learning in the Senior Secondary School?* (ERO)

### **Measurement of Attainment**

While there was some variation in the selection and use of entry point achievement data each school targets and tracks the achievement of individuals and groups of students who are achieving below the expected standard.

asTTle[i] was most commonly used in the junior secondary school but in some cases as a summative measure rather than a formative tool. Calculating value added in the secondary context was acknowledged as a challenge when the junior curriculum was not specifically aligned to curriculum levels or a standardised measure.

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[i] The asTTle assessment tool was designed to provide reliable and valid assessment information for teachers and students to enhance teaching and learning. This supports the shift in understanding of best educational practice from an emphasis on assessment of learning to assessment for learning.

In each of the secondary schools at least one senior leader regularly reviews senior achievement data – whether by individual or subject. In two schools sampled the senior leaders highlight variance in senior subject attainment progress with leaders of learning and next steps are co-constructed. In the other two secondary schools tracking was directed towards the achievement of individual students and a mentoring model was used to empower students to strive for successful outcomes.

One of those schools has a mentoring programme in place which includes every senior student and the other school intends to extend the mentoring programme to all Year 10 – 12 students in 2019. The mentoring model favoured by these two schools involves 1 teacher to 12-15 students meeting regularly as a group - either in a form time or a fortnightly timetabled session.

### **Teacher Disposition**

In all of the sample schools significant professional learning has been used to build an understanding of Dweck's growth mindset[i], positive relationships, cultural connectedness[ii] and knowing your learner[iii]. Collective responsibility for achievement is approached through teams/subject groups and supported by senior leadership in each of the schools included in this study. The use of professional learning time to reinforce and validate effective practice was common.

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[i] Five of the six senior educators interviewed specifically stated that teachers with a deficit mindset struggle to be effective

[ii] Mt Maunganui Intermediate School has been involved in Potanga Pounamu through the University of Waikato with a focus on inclusive relational practices. Currently each teaching team at MMIS includes one teacher fluent in te Reo and following the last ERO report the teachers have initiated a commitment to normalising te Reo in everyday practice. Northcote Intermediate School has been supported by a University of Auckland programme that provides facilitators in Pacific Island languages for parent meetings.

[iii] Glenfield College has a photo gallery of target students in each 'achievers group' (Level 1, 2, 3 and UE) in the staffroom and Deans highlight individual student progress on this board so that all teachers are aware of the progress to goals for the individual students.

## Implications and Conclusions

### *He tāngata He tāngata He tāngata*

From this limited study, school effectiveness in raising the achievement of students who initially present with attainment below the expected standard, is evident where senior leaders, heads of learning, deans, mentors and classroom teachers all strive for culturally responsive learning and use both qualitative and quantitative data to gain an understanding of exactly what is making a difference.

The teaching team approach seen in intermediate schools is less feasible in a secondary school where curriculum is delivered in subject specialist areas yet the team approach to raising individual achievement still exists in the secondary schools visited although in a different form. It is most commonly relationship based - through mentoring in some form.

Challenges of scale whether because of the size of the school or the annual cohort transition, necessitate structured approaches to learning support offered to students that are less personalised with a greater emphasis on students taking ownership of their own learning plan.

Shared responsibility and ownership of achievement goals where adult mentors co-construct goals and where students are included in learning programme design are significant in successful achievement.

Teacher–student-whanau relationships based on respect imply acknowledgement of culture and an openness to learning essential to engaging and motivating students to achieve success.

Senior secondary school priority is focused on the future of the individual and academic achievement while an explicit external measure of success is only one element contributing to empowering students to be actively involved lifelong learners.

I have been encouraged by the shared commitment of the professionals interviewed to an education that will maximise the opportunities for young people to engage in learning, experience success and be positive contributing members of society.

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