

SABBATICAL TOPIC

"How do differing school communities both nationally and internationally promote teacher and principal hauora"?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"How do differing school communities both nationally and internationally promote teacher and principal hauora (wellbeing)"?

From the small sample of schools in five countries visited, my answer would be, way better than we do in New Zealand. It has been a shock to see how far we sit behind other countries in terms of valuing, appreciating and supporting our teachers and principals wellbeing.

We need to financially invest in our teachers and principals, and give them time to do their job well. We need to support them with appropriate levels of staffing and designated professionals who can support them with the complex needs of children and schooling. We can no longer expect teachers and principals to extend their goodwill and hard work in the profession, without society recognizing and valuing what they do. Many teachers and principals are leaving the profession and many have nestled in more positively supported environments overseas.

The time for change is now. If the government is not going to take the lead in this now, we need to pull together as communities in the interim and work out ways to look after our staff.

PURPOSE

In 2018 I attended the Principal Moot in Wellington and hauora was an important part of one of our sessions. It underlines everything we do and if we are not in a position to give our best, or want to give our best then the children and families in our community are at a disadvantage.

There were some great ideas at the MOOT and I wanted to take this further to see what other Principals are doing in schools nationally and internationally to promote their teacher and principal wellbeing.

BACKGROUND

In our school, and in many other schools we currently have teachers who feel over worked and undervalued, we have a general teacher shortage in Auckland and more specifically a lack of Maori and Pasifika staff, we are struggling to support our students with complex special needs and we have leaders who need more professional support to deal with an ever increasing supply of workload and demands. This has prompted me to do some research in different school settings in different countries to see if we can learn from others ideas and successes, and as a result make positive changes for our staff.

METHODOLOGY

To read some current research from Health and Wellbeing conferences, forums and readings.

To go into a wide range of schools and talk to people in their workplace and get their feedback. As I was travelling some distances at times, I did diversify my focus to get the most out of sharing with schools, and time with my colleagues.

Every school was forwarded an email at least a month before my visit with a set of question prompts for us to discuss when I visited. (refer appendix).

The schools were chosen to provide a variety of settings and learnings both nationally and internationally. There were indigenous, private, boys, girls, secondary, lower socio-economic, higher socio-economic middle, full primary, catholic, not for profit, international, independent and special need schools.

Most visits and discussions lasted one and a half to two hours.

FINDINGS

- Teachers and principals across the 6 countries and 25 schools visited all feel the burden of an increasingly complex job. To provide the differentiated programmes needed for children, and live up to the high expectations of parents and educational leaders is demanding and exhausting. Everyone I met loved the job, but many were fatigued and talked of colleagues leaving the teaching profession feeling over worked and under valued.
- We pay our teachers significantly (over \$10,000 and up to \$50,000) less than the schools I visited overseas.
- We give our teachers less release time than other countries. Our teachers get an average of an hours release time a week. All overseas schools were giving at least 2 hours per week and most were up to a day per week release time. The international schools I visited aim for a ratio of 3:5 release time hours to instructional time hours.
- Many of the schools I visited had specialists in the school to support teachers who have students with complex needs.
- Most schools were immersing their staff in professional development around social emotional learning.
- Access for teachers (and their families) to health and wellbeing packages including health care, dental, counselling, massage therapy, wellness

facilities were provided by the school/ district.

- All schools visited provided a retirement plan option for staff.
- Most schools provided other incentives to attract quality staff - housing packages, transport passes, daily lunches, generous professional development opportunities.
- Most primary schools had specialist teachers for physical education, music and art funded by their release component.
- Principal wellbeing was in general, left to the principal.
- Principals in general, looked after the wellbeing of the other members of their leadership team and staff.
- Support for Principals was generally given in their first year in the job.
- Most Principals were working from 7.30am to 6pm, then working later at night after dinner and when children had gone to bed. Most were spending 3-6 hours a weekend on school work. Only a beginning principal did not take home work on the weekend. (This was in a hub in Edmonton where the authority and leadership of principals was limited).

IMPLICATIONS

The implications for the teaching profession in New Zealand are wide reaching and profound. We are losing teachers at an alarming rate to other professions. We are losing teachers overseas. We have teacher shortages. We have stressed out and burnt out teachers and principals. We have less people aspiring to leadership roles. We do not have adequate support for our teachers in classes - the complex nature of the job and the complex nature of our children are beyond many of our teachers. We have a lack of support from the Ministry and specialists to deal with children who have complex needs. There is a lack of release time for our teachers to be able to prepare for the needs of students within their class. We do not have adequate health and wellbeing support to help our teachers and principals when things are tough. We have a government who currently seem to want to work with us, but on the other hand they are spending money on overseas teachers rather than investing in, and keeping, our own.

A recent survey on Principal health and wellbeing in New Zealand conducted by Associate Professor Phillip Riley reported the following concerns

"In 2018, respondents' levels of *burnout, stress, sleeping troubles and cognitive stress symptoms* remain at levels far higher than that of the general population. *Self-rated health* has decreased by almost 8% since 2016, while *burnout, depressive symptoms*

and somatic stress symptoms have all increased."

A further telling finding relates to hours of work:

"Less than 1% of respondents work 40 hours or less per week during term time. This includes school leaders who are not released full-time from their classroom responsibilities to carry out their leadership roles. Seventy-two percent worked between 41 – 60 hours per week on average, with the remaining 27.3 percent working more than 61 hours per week, the highest proportion of respondents reporting that result since the survey began. "

The future does not look bright and unless we address these issues alongside a dramatic pay increase (30 % plus), we are dreaming to think a large volume of our talented young people are going to want to take up teaching as their profession. We therefore will struggle to put a great principal and teacher in front of each child in New Zealand. Great teachers and principals help create great children, and they are the future of our country.

The other implication is more internal. In our school we do not have any faith that major change to turn this situation around will happen quickly, so the question becomes what are we going to do “in our place” to promote hauora ? It is important to be proactive and lead change, and we will be taking on board some of the programmes and ideas from colleagues in New Zealand and abroad. These include increased release time, a wellbeing team and wellness challenges, a health and wellbeing leader, wellbeing programmes for children, professional learning, surveys to see how we can help, wellbeing support from professionals, a

health and wellbeing component in our strategic and annual plans.

Our overall goal will be to attract and retain quality staff who know that we will value them and look after them as they lead the children of Whangaparaoa into the future.

BENEFITS

The benefits of this sabbatical have been significant. Some have been

- Time to step away from the job and look inwards, without having the daily workload and pressures to deal with
- Time to speak to colleagues and professionals about key issues
- Time to read
- Time with my family
- The chance to travel in a non - holiday period
- The opportunity to just enjoy looking at schools and see and hear what excites children
- The chance to reflect on an action plan going forward and take strategic action to positively address some key issues
- To learn from others, to debate and share

The really strange thing after thirty years was to have time.

This report will be shared back to our COL and the Hibiscus Coast cluster of principals. I hope that my sabbatical findings will motivate them in some way to

make things better for them, their staff and ultimately, the children in their school.

Within our school, there will be discussions and a slide show presentation to share my findings. I have ten change points for them to consider and discuss. Alongside these ideas and others the community may have, we will form our next 3 year strategic plan.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the years we have seen many talented teachers and principals either leave our profession, or leave our country to pursue their career overseas.

Some of the reasons for this are : workload, lack of release time, poor remuneration for the work they do, lack of respect and not feeling valued, increasing demands and criticism from the parent community, more complex children whose needs they can't accommodate within the expectations of modern teaching, an all-encompassing job where you take on the lives of the children in your class and all that entails, as well as trying to help them be the best they can be by personalizing their learning. This means planning at night usually, not to mention checking the ever increasing email list. On top of this there are all sorts of meetings and out of school time commitments that can quickly diminish the personal time, and family time for the individual. We expect our teachers to be all things, to all people, all of the time. We expect them to adapt a growth mindset and be changing all of the time to provide the best learning experiences for all of their children. We expect them to build relationships with each child and family, to be cool under pressure and to be enterprising and charismatic every minute of the day.

If we are going to expect this, and more, we need to think about how we as a society and community give back, so that in the future we can attract the very best people to be in front of our children.

There are many things that need to be worked through to support our teachers,

however the three things that I believe need to be addressed in order to improve hauora and wellbeing for teachers in this current untenable environment are

1. Pay teachers an attractive salary (at least \$20,000 more per year.
2. Increase their release time to be able to cope with the pressures above - this needs to be tripled if we want our teachers at their best.
3. Provide specialists to support teachers and schools so that children with complex needs are looked after within the school environment.

Please note these measures are not drastic and would only bring us into the same “ballpark” as other countries. Ironically, many schools I visited overseas reported similar fatigue, exhaustion, sickness and stress. The dropout rate of teachers is around 40% in the first 5 years of teaching, as people find other more attractive and less taxing ways to earn their income and pay their mortgages.

Other incentives and initiatives from schools I have visited include

- Staff wellness packages and plans
- Increased staffing and qualified personnel to support children and families with complex needs.
- Mindfulness and wellbeing programmes for students (e.g. Pause - Breathe - Smile, Philosophy for Children, Mana Ake)
- Wrap around service teams
- Wellbeing models (Te Whare Tapawha, PERMA, Te Pae Mahutonga, Te

Wheke).

- Implement a school assessment tool (Awesome Schools, HPS Schools Review Checklist, NZCER review tools).

In terms of principal hauora and wellbeing, the one thing that stood out is that although most principals are aware of the stresses their teachers face each day, and try to work out ways to be supportive, no-one is really aware of the multi-dimensional pressures that principals face. When I asked principals who plans for their wellbeing and ensures they have release time or down time, most looked at me quizzically and said “that’s a good question, I suppose I do !”

Not many principals had a plan for their own wellbeing that they stick to. Their commitment to their school and staff often meant that “other stuff” got in the way.

In talking with principals across the schools, they felt the following factors to be key to their own wellbeing : having a mentor available to guide and advise as needed; keeping fit; time away from the workplace in worktime; time with colleagues; having professional backing (legal, human resource, property, health and wellbeing, finance) as needed and ongoing professional learning in these areas, time with family, time to pursue interests that have nothing to do with education. It is clear that the one thing that we as principals need, is time, which is actually the thing we have least of.

Chatting to the Canadian principals, none were supportive of a centralized hub

which they saw as taking away from their autonomy as a school. However, many did feel it would be great to be able to have ready access to a team of professionals who could come and work with you if you wanted or needed support. There was no hiding from the fact that all felt that they would love to have an expert partner to help them with property, finance, health and safety, personnel and learning at times and as the need arises. The other idea was to work with a group of local principals and have these experts readily available to support our professional learning in these areas.

Most principals were working very long hours and taking issues to sleep with them each night. All shared a love for the job, but most were exhausted.

The four areas I feel that could start addressing some of the wellbeing issues for principals are

1. A more commensurate salary with very good CEO'S
2. Release time away from the workplace
3. Specialist support in areas of need
4. A mentor who constantly is working through and monitoring a wellbeing plan.

REFERENCES

Books I read on sabbatical

LEISURE (but work related).

“Legacy” by James Kerr - What the All Blacks can teach us about life, learning and leadership.

“Pound the Stone” by Joshua Medcalf - Timeless principles that inspire people to greatness, told in an engaging fable.

CURRICULUM

1. Our Schooling Futures : Stronger Together. A report by the Tomorrows Schools Independent Taskforce.
2. Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students, OECD Publishing, Paris. 2017.
3. The Pyramid of Intervention : A Framework for Supporting All Students by Edmonton Public Schools.
4. Changing Teacher Mindsets : Supporting Collaborative Work in Innovative Learning Environments by Carolyn Marino. 2016
5. Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey : Stress and Burnout. Associate Professor Phillip Riley.

Appendix

Dear Principal ,

First and foremost, thank you sincerely for allowing me to visit your school and take some of your precious time. It is much appreciated.

It is a privilege to be granted a sabbatical and be given time to :

1. Think about our school and the vision we have to take our students forward into their future
2. Look into some aspects of school life, and see how other schools nationally and internationally are creatively managing these issues
3. Spend time with family and explore different places in the world
4. Refresh and refocus

I have always treasured visiting other schools, looking at how people do things differently, talking to people about what they are creating for their children and seeing the students in action buzzing about the opportunities they have.

In order to make the most of my time with you, I have prepared some questions/ focus areas that will hopefully give you a “heads up” about the purpose of my visit, and what I will ask you. However, I also do not want my visit to be limited by my sabbatical topics and my thinking. If you are excited about an initiative that is doing great things, I would love to hear about it.

QUESTIONS/ AREAS of FOCUS

1. Attracting and retaining quality staff is critical to a school's success. What are the things you do to enhance staff culture and preserve staff wellbeing? What release time do your staff get, what about your curriculum or team leaders how many meetings do they have a week, what incentives do you provide for staff, how do you look after their health and wellbeing so they don't burn out and ensure work life balance is preserved?
2. More and more children are arriving at school with complex behavioural, mental, emotional, social and physical needs. What do you have in place for children who are behaviourally challenged, the children who are non-compliant, defiant, rude, violent - the ones who can turn a learning environment upside down very quickly? We seem to have more children (and parents!) that are presenting with anxiety, is this an issue for your school, and if so, what are your plans and ideas?
3. Our Maori (our indigenous culture) struggle on the whole to achieve as highly in our education system as Europeans. Do you have any thoughts or programmes that you think could be useful in addressing this?
4. Have you any programme in particular you use to target boys' writing?
5. What do you love most about your school? (besides the children of course). What are the things that students are really excited about - what would they love most? What programmes and interventions are you most proud of, and give the greatest outcomes?
6. What do you do differently to engage students - in class, at break time, trips, anything - what defines your school as unique for the students?

What else would you like to share or ask?

I look forward to meeting you shortly and having time to talk about our schools and our children.
Thanks again
Kevin Cronin
Principal of Whangaparaoa School

