

Sabbatical Report

Tracy Walker: Principal Waitaki Girls' High School

Sabbatical Time: Term Three 2019

'An Investigation into Developing Resilience in Learning.'

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for the opportunity to take this sabbatical. I am appreciative to the Board of Waitaki Girls' High School for their support of my application as well as the Senior Leadership Team and senior staff who stood in during my absence. I also wish to acknowledge and thank the following people and organisations for hosting me during my sabbatical:

Hana Detering – a former GAP tutor now studying to be a teacher in Germany.

Katherine Blakey – a former Waitaki Girls' High School student now working for the New Zealand Embassy in Germany.

Professor Jorg Rademacher – teacher at Freudenheim Gymnasium Mannheim and also oversees their regional teacher training programme.

Angelika Weber – teacher Karolinen Gymnasium Rosenheim.

Karen Money – Principal of Melbourne Girls' College.

Sarah Davies – Principal of Rotorua Girls' High School.

Beth Pottinger – Careers Advisor Wairarapa College.

Barbara Agnew – Principal of Queens' High School.

Executive Summary:

Purpose: After seven years as principal of Waitaki Girls' High School, I wanted to see how other schools, learning organizations and educationalists were considering and implementing competencies around building resilience in learning and developing growth mindsets. We had adopted resiliency in learning as one of our core values and embedded it in our Positive Behaviour for Learning expectations. We were increasingly concerned about the effects of Social Media on girls and young women setting them up to be perfectionists and unwilling to take risks in learning. We had been studying and working with the theories of Guy Claxton on Building Learning Power and Carol Dweck's work on Growth Mindsets. We have developed a Professional Learning Community amongst our teachers based on sharing best practice. We have joined a Kahui Ako – The Waitaki Ara – and were focusing on

achievement goals related to our learning community based on teacher inquiry. We aimed to focus on encouraging in-class engagement and rich learning experiences as well as engaging with the wider community. We had set targets around learner agency and student wellbeing.

So, some key areas I wanted to investigate included:

- Building resiliency in learning – what methods can schools use to build resilience for students?
- How have other schools and educationalists use common strategies and growthmindset models to empower teachers and students in their practice?
- How does this link into programmes we are currently working with such as Teaching Positive Behaviour for Learning; school wide mentoring; cross curricular initiatives?
- Pathways education – what examples and models are other schools using to develop and support transition within and beyond school?

Background and Rationale:

Waitaki Girls' High School has introduced many new programmes during the past few years including our Positive Behaviour for Learning platform, school wide mentoring and school wide reviews. As part of our review we identified that we needed to ensure more time for one to one careers advice and develop a more coherent school wide approach to preparing students for life beyond school. I was keen to see how other schools have introduced wider types of information for students to consider, especially those of a non-traditional pathway.

We are also a fairly traditional school (over 137 years of history) and have an older heritage teaching space (The Junior Block) while many of our students come from contributing schools that use more open; cross curricular learning spaces. Could I learn how other secondary schools were dealing with this challenge?

Methodology:

Most of my investigation was centred on visiting schools to meet and discuss with other school leaders how they approach some of the challenges we face. By visiting other schools, speaking to students and staff, a range of dialogue could assist in developing ideas in how Waitaki Girls' High School could develop in these areas. The German school visits were also based on the fact we do exchanges with German schools and I wanted to compare and contrast the two educational systems and make some connections and networks for possible future exchanges. I had hoped to meet with some staff from the Graduate School of Education in Melbourne University but unfortunately we were not able to connect. I was able to read, 'Visible Learning Insights' by John Hattie and Klaus Zierer and also, 'Giving Effective Feedback' by Luke Mandouit who all are based at the Graduate School of Education Melbourne. They have been doing substantial research into Visible Learning and

Giving Effective Feedback which fed back into the theme of developing resilience in learning. I also read, “The Dolphin Way” by Dr Shimi Kang. I had heard her speak at SPANZ conference and found her ideas on POD – the importance of Play, Others, Downtime very significant and connected to the concepts of resilience, curiosity and perseverance to learn and wellbeing.

Findings:

Freudenheim Gymnasium Mannheim: is a morning school only, based on the German Gymnasium system – I found it very interesting that the school had little to no use of digital devices in the classroom. Students had cell phones but these were strictly forbidden in the classroom and Google is also prohibited in German schools. Learning is based on preparing students for university. I observed high levels of classroom learning strategies based on analysis and encouraging students to be critical thinkers. As a morning only school, there is not a concurrent programme of sporting and cultural activities as we would run in New Zealand. School wide policies which did promote resilience were based on the rule that all students must go outside and have some connection with nature during the breaks. Also noted that students remained in the classroom while teachers moved around. Professor Jorg Rademacher, who hosted me during this school visit and organized lesson observations and meeting with the principal is also involved in teacher training. It was interesting to note that all German teacher trainees must first obtain a five year masters degree and then do a two year paid internship in a school working alongside an experienced teacher before they had their own classes. Their university degree is free (no fees) and they essentially don’t start teaching their own classes until at least 7 years from their leaving high school themselves. This is a considerable investment in the teaching career. Hana Detering, who also hosted me during this visit and was a teacher trainee herself had used this seven year apprenticeship to have a GAP year in New Zealand and semester at Melbourne University. While not everyone can agree with the German 3 tiered school system, the lack of technology in learning did not seem to be disadvantaging students and was helping towards developing strong critical thinking skills. Some German schools also take advantage of industry partnerships for example with Mercedes which saw targeted students mentored through senior high school into industry positions.

The Karolinen Gymnasium – a much larger school – also runs an afternoon programme involving cultural activities. Again, there was little use of digital devices in the classroom and a very wide range of curriculum on offer. Again, a high level of critical thinking was expected of students and cell phones were not permitted in the classroom. This lack of focus on technology did not seem to be hindering student progress.

Melbourne Girls’ College – has begun a programme of updating more traditional classrooms with glass sliding doors and using the design of lockers to provide standing posts in break out corridor spaces. So, while still retaining single use classrooms there is now the

provision to open them out to shared spaces and break out spaces for collaborative and co-operative teaching and learning to occur. They have also developed a Student Support Centre with two Psychologists on site. They have been working in a school cluster and liaising with Professor Lee Waters on Positive Psychology and an affirmative whole school approach. They have also appointed a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) teacher to map out cross curricular opportunities to explore providing STEAM across the school. Teachers were increasingly in cross curricular collaboration or exploration of how they could be more so. In many ways, they were in a similar situation to Waitaki Girls' High School in terms of specialist subject teachers in single cell classrooms but the opportunity to be more collaborative and team teach where required.

Rotorua Girls' College – was basing its Positive Behaviour for Learning programme on the stories and culture of the Rotorua and Arawa whenua. It was looking to establish Pathway Assemblies – where former students from non traditional careers talk to the students about their experiences. It was looking to establish a Teacher Aide in each junior classroom as a means to provide ongoing support and was re-establishing a Tuakana-Teina Year 12 and 9 buddy system. These were initiatives aimed at promoting student resilience, perseverance and curiosity and open up vision as to the wider world and career pathways. To promote teacher wellbeing, it had established a Staff Wellness Committee, Puzzle corner in the staff room, walking groups and bought Fitbits with a 50/50 subsidy for those staff who wished to have one.

Wairarapa College – Has established a mentoring system in which every student has a teacher as a mentor (the Ako programme) and each group meets on a regular basis. The school has adopted 'My Mahi' as their platform to support these learning and career discussions. This seemed to provide more depth to the learning conversations held between students and mentors. The conversations each had a particular focus at each year level and were centred on such questions as, "Who am I?" "What is important to me?" Goal setting, achievement tracking and career aspirations.

Queens' High School – Has developed strong processes to enable their Student Council to include student voice in school decision making. This has encouraged more active engagement and perseverance from students in the teaching and learning process as they feel their recommendations will be listened to and implemented.

The Graduate School of Education Melbourne: in reading ‘Visible Learning Insights’ and ‘Giving Effective Feedback’, several points linked directly to the question I was exploring – how to develop more resilience in learners. The message was clear that schools do not have to make fundamental changes in order to improve student engagement, perseverance and curiosity in learning. A very simple process of turning the emphasis from senior leaders and teachers asking themselves, ‘How do I teach?’ to rather “ How do my students learn?” This involves interviewing students regularly.

Teachers at Kambrya College in Melbourne did this and saw a remarkable improvement in student achievement and learning. Their process was simple. They asked the Graduate School of Education for advice but used no outside consultants; no one visited them; they simply looked at their teaching through the eyes of their students. Staff collectively discussed learning success and teaching quality from the students’ perspective and also made an agreement to make this understanding the principle of all instruction. They chose sharing learning goals and criteria as the common language in all classrooms; but it really doesn’t matter what the words are as long as all are using them.

It could have been, “feedback”, “challenge” and “we welcome errors”. What was much more important, however, was, first, the underlying process whereby the staff collectively discussed learning success and teaching quality from the students’ perspective; and second, the agreement to make this understanding the principle of all instruction. P127 ‘Visible Learning Insights’, Hattie/Zierer.

This is clearly demonstrated in The Visible Learning Wheel whereby clarity around what is being learned and why is shared explicitly within the classroom. Teachers need to be able to give convincing answers to students’ questions as why this affects me. They also need to be evaluative on the impact they are making.

This segues to what we have been implementing as a school within our Kahui Ako in terms of teacher inquiry.

Dr Shimi Kang – ‘The Dolphin Way’

Dr Kang’s premise is that we have lost our way in 21st century living and learning. She uses the analogy of the Dolphin as a model for teachers and parents to build resiliency and motivation in learning and life.

Play: play activates the pre-frontal cortex of our brains. When we play we develop that area of critical thinking and adaptability. We become comfortable with unpredictability. Play is how we learn to adapt.

Others: our social connection is a basis for life. Social media has created a barrier to simple social bonding and connecting ourselves to something bigger than ourselves.

Downtime: Relaxed wakefulness, such as looking at the stars or clouds, closing our eyes in a moment of downtime are important moments. When we give ourselves time to slow down, be mindful research shows enhanced mental stability and critical thinking. When we have no downtime, we are constantly plugged in and that negatively impacts on our mental faculties.

All three components of POD are powerful and can be facilitated through nature and being outdoors.

To quote Einstein, “Look deeply into nature and then you will understand everything better.”

Implications:

Benefits: Issues around resiliency and growth mindsets are areas that many young people are grappling with. We see increasing amounts of fragility and anxiety around learning for girls as pressures of social media impact. Our strategic and Annual Plans over the past four years have been focused on building learning capacity and developing growth mindsets. These also correlate with our implementation of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and the work we have done in our professional development programme in terms of encouraging and building teacher capacity, coaching each other for success and building a coherent platform for holistic teaching and learning. Part of our Inquiry process within the Kahui Ako also builds on this. We need to continue to ask ourselves and our students what does good learning look like for them and implement simple but common learning strategies across the school – much as we have started to do with our implementation of PB4L and our Teacher Inquiries.

Our approach to wellbeing and resilience has been based on a holistic whole school learning community adopting opportunities to come together to ‘play’ and interact. The importance of ‘playing’ can’t be overlooked in terms of improving wellbeing and resilience. We need to continue to build on our holistic concept of every student involved in some activity, whether co-curricular or lunchtime ‘play’ and provide the resourcing to ensure this can happen. We need to continue to come together as a learning and living community to celebrate and engage in activities that are going to benefit our wellbeing and sense of connection.

We need to continue to engage in conversation/interviews/surveys/exit activities with our students about what it means to be a learner in our school. We need to define these questions of teaching that become binding for us as teachers and visible to learners (much as we do with our Positive Behaviour for Learning processes – I see this as an extension of that). These questions need to be a central focus in the classroom and referred to again and again in class. Many of our teachers have already begun this process in particular with Growth Mindset Memes. We need to embed it school wide. Make learning visible, create

challenges, and enable self-commitment, trust, appropriate expectations, and conceptual understanding. (Hattie p127)

We need to continue to provide pathways for our students that are going to enable them to lead fulfilling lives and careers. Identifying who they are and what is important to them is critical to this conversation and embedding this further into our mentoring system is key. Genuinely providing resourcing and time to enable a Careers Advisor to give the one-on-one guidance and be a leader of careers throughout the school community is a basis of our careers restructure. This means additional personnel to assist as Head of Pathways to ensure all students have options and appropriate courses to undertake.

Conclusions: The sabbatical was a wonderful way for me to explore a range of contexts within other schools and do wider reading and study. It gave me the strong belief that the current pathway we are on is a useful model to enhance resilience in learning but we need to continually remind ourselves of the core values underpinning it.

- Clarity in the classroom and what we are learning and why
- Continually asking our students what good learning looks like for them
- Evaluating our progress and modifying our programmes as necessary
- Connected to this is continuing to map the curriculum for commonality of content and opportunities to explore STEAM in context
- Holistic teaching based on mentoring, knowing our learners and the stories they bring and being responsive to this
- Considered use of technology in the classroom with the proviso is this encouraging critical thinking skills for students?
- Resourcing for strong pathways with Careers advice more freely available; coherent pathway coordination to enable students to try a range of opportunities while still in school
- Opportunities for POD – Play, Others, Downtime.

Bibliography:

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