

Principals and Teachers Step up for Feet First

By Jamie Sitzia, NZ Transport Agency

A reference group of principals and teachers from across New Zealand have been consulting on the development of the new Feet First Walk to School Every Week programme.

Feet First 2009 encourages primary school students to walk to school with a caregiver, friend, or organised walking group at least once a week, every week, during term time.

This year Feet First also provides curriculum content for teachers to talk about walking in relation to safety, exploring, creativity, and saving the planet. Teachers will be able to draw from a range of curriculum resources that link to the environmental, social, economic and health benefits of going on foot. The whole approach is around encouraging learning opportunities and supporting safe walking.

Students and teachers will have the opportunity to consider the wider issues related to walking such as urban design, community development or the environment. They could study family history looking at 'how we used to walk to school' or look at the health benefits of active travel.

The reference group's contributions during Feet First's development were necessary to ensure schools can easily engage with the curriculum resources and find elements of the programme to suit their varied community needs.

Dr Paul Potaka, Principal of Nelson Central School agrees that being involved at the start of the project was vital.

"Feet First addresses so many important issues including respect for our environment, healthy living and child safety around schools that we couldn't help but be involved in the programme. We were delighted to be involved in the planning stages since that gave us an opportunity to shape the content and form of the programme to ensure it is relevant to schools and their current curriculum obligations."

The Feet First 2009 project is a quiet one that works with, and beside, other projects including those already established in environmental issues, health and physical wellbeing. The prizes are designed to encourage use of the website – especially the curriculum materials which



have been designed to work with the NZ curriculum document.

During the year all schools can use the curriculum materials and those who are registered to take part will receive other printed materials and can submit walking blogs, stories and case studies. Some schools may also choose to develop some of these walking stories and submit them into the NZTA Picture Book Challenge. In Term 4 the winning school will get the chance to publish their own picture book on active travel while working alongside a professional author, illustrator and editor. The winning school's book will have a professional launch and be distributed to every school library in New Zealand.

Online registrations are now open at the interactive Feet First website www.feetfirst.govt.nz or you can email feetfirst@nzta.govt.nz. The site hosts the curriculum resources and will showcase articles, case studies and links to class blog sites so participating schools can compare and share information.

Examples of the Feet First curriculum resources include:

Term 1 – Road Safety

- English – Road safety and visual language
- Mathematics and Statistics – Road safety: A statistical investigation

Term 2 – Walking and Exploring

- Mathematics and Statistics – Exploring how far it is between here and there
- Social Studies – Exploring people and places when walking

Term 3 – Walking and Creating

- The Arts: Music – Creating music from sounds heard when walking
- Science – Creating clean air through human action

Term 4 – Walking and Helping the Planet

- Mathematics and Statistics – Helping the planet: A statistical investigation on choosing to walk
- Social Studies – Helping the planet through the way we travel ■



The walking principals picture attached has the following people from the reference group (left to right):

Mike Anderson, Principal, Waimairi School; (face hidden) John Petrie, Principal, Gulf Harbour School; Dr Paul Potaka, Principal, Nelson Central School; Susan Hutchinson-Daniel, Greater Wellington Regional Council; (hidden) Pam Hook, Hooked on Thinking (curriculum resource developers), Claire Dixon, Auckland City Council; Adelle Jenson, Teacher, Ngaio School; Rob Callaghan, Principal, Kaiapoi North School; Margaret Palmer, Principal, Waterlea School; Isabel Brown, Principal Lecturer Critical Studies in Education, Auckland University

Transition in a School Cluster: the Process of a Project

By Bruce Kent

A cluster of schools in Manurewa engaged in an action learning project (the Manurewa transition project) to enhance the transitions between schools. The project was evaluated to identify the processes that contributed to positive outcomes. This article summarises those findings.

Introduction

The precursor of the current project was the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EPISE) project that was funded by the Ministry of Education in 2003 – 2006. Some schools in the Manurewa cluster had been involved in the EPISE project and received further funding from Group Special Education (GSE) in 2007 and 2008 to extend the work that had been undertaken.

A facilitator from GSE collaborated with the Manurewa Enhancement Initiative (MEI) committee and the agreed focus of the extended project was the transition of students with identified special needs.

At the time of conducting the process evaluation the Manurewa transition project had been underway for approximately 18 months. The initial phase of the project had involved one secondary school and contributing feeder schools but that broadened to include all schools in the MEI area and transitions between primary and intermediate as well as intermediate (or full primary) to secondary.

After successive iterations a transition form relating to students with special educational needs was developed. Teacher and school feedback indicated a high level of satisfaction with the utility of the form and the project team commissioned an external evaluation of the processes that positively contributed to the development of the initiative. The focus of that evaluation was on the features that participants indicated contributed to constructive outcomes and are likely to be generalisable to future initiatives. The essential question was therefore “what positively contributed to the constructive outcomes of the project?”

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to a little over an hour. The average time was about 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent checking and thematic analysis.

Participants

Potential interviewees were identified from the project facilitator’s list of participants and were approached to consent to an interview. No-one declined to be interviewed. Participants were invited on the basis of (a) the level of involvement, (b) duration of involvement, and (c) ability to balance the representation of the sample. The affiliation and role of the 14 interviewees is presented in the following table. The number of checks exceeds 14 because some specialist support personnel work across settings.

	Secondary	Intermediate	Primary	Other
Principal			√	
DP/AP	√√	√√	√√	
Teacher		√	√	
Specialist Support	√√√	√√	√√	√√

Results

The identification of keywords by the participants provided some indication of what mattered to them. The participants’ keywords were considered in the light of recent literature relating to learning communities and professional development in education (c.f. Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, & Evans, 2003; Earl & Katz, 2005; Fullan, 2005; Guskey & Huberman, 1999; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; Robertson & Webber, 2002; Timperley, Wilson, Barrer & Fung, 2008). From the experience of the participants it is suggested that a collaborative development initiative will be enhanced when:

- The need for the initiative matches the participants’ priorities and is consistent with the realities of the local community.
- The initiative has and maintains a well-defined focus on its objective.
- The participants perceive the initiative as coming from their activities and belonging to them.
- The initiative has a facilitator who is enthusiastic, tenacious, knowledgeable and committed. This includes the ability to (a) nurture relationships and (b) identify and work with key mediators of the initiative.
- The facilitator applies a range of teaching/facilitation strategies to actively involve participants.
- The participants have senior management support and the capability to enact change.
- The initiative consults but also takes action to produce an outcome within a specified timeframe.
- The participants are able to influence the organisation they represent.
- The goal of the initiative is sufficiently important to attract resourcing.
- There is sufficient resourcing to fund an external facilitator and expertise from outside the local area.
- Consultation and planning meetings are made easy for participants to access and pleasant to attend.
- Relevant local data combined with research evidence are applied to the local context.

Woven through the feedback on the project was a consistent sense that the participants’ felt they had engaged in a collaborative and productive activity that produced outcomes of practical use in their contexts. The participants were the ‘drivers’ of the project and the focus was sufficiently relevant to their situations to engender support at the local (classroom) level. Lewis and Andrews (2001) maintain that successful change in education happens when teachers share a vision.

The evidence of the various symposia in 2006 at which schools undertaking initiatives in the EPISE project shared their experiences

demonstrated that as well as collaboration and ongoing inquiry into practice, real change needed organisational leadership. As Timperley, Wilson, Barrer and Fung (2008) state, "leadership for professional development involves a strong organisational component, the ability to make things happen" (p.192). Repeatedly the participants in the transition project noted that the active support of school management was a key component in bringing about change. The role of an external researcher/facilitator has been supported in the literature (e.g. Buysee, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003; Holden, 2002) and evidently enhanced the work of schools involved in EEPiSE initiatives (Kent, 2006). A key role of the external researcher/facilitator was being a mediator of literature and research evidence that was meaningful to participants.

The product of the process undertaken by the Manurewa Cluster will be presented in a follow-up article by Pam Higgins in the next issue of New Zealand Principal (June '09). ■

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Allocating Those Management Units

By The Editor

As service to principals, we print below the stories of four school leaders and their decisions to allocate units to reflect responsibilities within their schools.

1 **POHUTUKAWA PRIMARY SCHOOL** has a roll of 480, and received its first allocation of additional units, as negotiated under the collective agreement. The principal and Leadership staff discussed the school organisation and priorities, referring to the useful guidelines issued by the NZEI. The principal invited suggestions from teaching staff on the best use of the Units, and advised the Board of Trustees of the decisions made.

There was a clear preference to (a) recognise the workload and responsibilities carried by the two deputy principals, and (b) recognise those who already held significant responsibilities, without receiving a unit. In addition, with the full implementation of the 1:15 staffing for five-year-olds, an opportunity arose to restructure the school into two larger teaching teams (syndicates) and to create the new position of Assistant Principal. Here's how it looked:

PREVIOUS ALLOCATION		NEW ALLOCATION (7 additional units)	
Deputy Principal 1	5 Units	Now Deputy Principal 1	6 Units
Deputy Principal 2	4 Units	Deputy Principal 2	5 Units
–		(New) Assistant Principal	3 Units
Team Leader 1	1 Unit	(New) Team Coordinator 1	1 Unit
–		(New) Team Coordinator 2	1 Unit
Specific Unit Holders	3 @ 1 each	Specific Unit Holders	4 @ 1 each
TOTAL UNITS: 13 (6 people)		TOTAL UNITS: 20 (9 people)	

2 **KARAKA BERRY SCHOOL** has a roll of 470, and has received a similar number of additional units. The principal and senior staff decided on a different approach to the school's organisation, to recognise the large number of people carrying additional responsibilities.

Their final allocation looks like this:

Deputy Principal 1	4 Units
Deputy Principal 2	3 Units
5 Directors	1 Unit each
(Maths, English, ICT, Hauora, Curriculum/Inquiry Learning)	
4 Team Leaders	1 Unit each
(5-year-olds, Year 1-2, Year 3-4, Year 5-6, Year 7-8)	
Numeracy L'ship	2 Units
SENCO	1 Unit
School-Wide Events	1 Unit
TOTAL UNITS: 20 (14 people)	

3 **GARDEN GROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL** has a roll of 320, and is organised along traditional lines.

The school received 7 additional units (some due to roll growth). They were distributed after much discussion with senior management and then the whole staff. 60% of the units are permanent and the remainder are fixed term as per the contract. All teachers had the opportunity to apply for the additional unit positions.

PREVIOUS ALLOCATION		NEW ALLOCATION	
D P (Jun Leader)	3	D P (Jun Leader)	4
Team Leader (Sen)	1	Senior Team Leader	2
Team Leader (Mid)	1	Middle Team Leader	2
Teacher Librarian	1	Teacher Librarian	1
SENCO	1	SENCO	1
Enviroschool	1	Enviroschool	1
		ICT	1
		Maths PD Leadership	1
		Schoolwide Activities	1
		Care Code/Competencies	1
TOTAL UNITS: 8 (6 people)		TOTAL UNITS: 15 (10 people)	

4 **BIG RIVER PRIMARY SCHOOL**, with a roll of 230, had 8 units previously and received an additional two. The "Before" and "After" scenario look like this:

PREVIOUS ALLOCATION		NEW ALLOCATION (2 additional units)	
Deputy Principal	2 Units	DP	Now 3 Units
Assistant Principal	1 Unit	AP1	2 Units
(+ 2 fixed term Units: Literacy & Planning)		AP2	2 Units
3 Units for Sports, Special Needs and Library		3 Units for Sports, Special Needs and EHSAS	
TOTAL UNITS: 8 (5 people)		TOTAL UNITS: 10 (6 people)	

General Notes:

- There are "pluses and minuses" involved in all scenarios. Spreading the units over a large number of staff can lead to a feeling of "Too many chiefs; not enough Indians". Restricting them to a small number may lead to a feeling of "Them and Us" (The old coalmine culture of "Bosses vs Workers"), and principals need to consider the ramifications of all options.
- It is appropriate to develop Job Descriptions for these extra responsibilities, and to link them with the school's appraisal process.
- Principals will need to consider the number of permanent units, and the longer-term constraints involved.
- A second allocation of units will be made for the start of 2010. Plan ahead! ■

School Lines

A regular column from Lester Flockton

A Briefing on the Briefing to the Incoming Minister

It is widely known and accepted internationally that those organisations, institutions, enterprises and systems that succeed beyond and rise above others are those that are led and inspired by a strong sense of vision and vitality, particularly when they are embraced by those who work with and support that leadership and inspiration. A powerful vision in leadership is the yeast that ferments and energises an appetising and palatable forward thinking direction.

If a new Minister of Education happened to be short on vision, narrow on bright ideas, and lacklustre on inspiration, then such a Minister in the New Zealand context might expect to receive little nourishment and enlightenment from its civil servants in its Ministry of Education if its “Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Education”, November 2008, is anything to go by. The Executive Summary sets the tone:

Education achievement has a major influence on income, social mobility, quality of life and other important life outcomes. For New Zealand as a country, the success of the education system is a necessary condition for achievement, productivity, growth and international competitiveness.

We might ask ourselves, what is the vision for education that gets the emphasis here: productivity; competitiveness? Aren't they the current sing-along of every developed and developing country? Perhaps these are essential to personal, social and cultural sustenance, but they certainly are by no means sufficient. So what are we to reap from a State funded system whose penchant is the synthetic seed from the hot beds of syntheses? The briefing summary continues:

Specific professional development programmes have led to gains in literacy and numeracy for target groups. ... However, the system continues to under-perform for specific groups of learners. Despite increases in educational expenditure, there has been insufficient progress in reducing persistent, long-standing educational disparities.

The briefing papers are short on a rigor-based analysis of the underlying causes of this lingering malady. To even suggest that it is mainly a teaching problem is quite misleading. Yet it resorts to single-minded and lop-sided panaceas:

Professional leadership by school principals plays an important role by setting expectations and supporting teachers to meet the learning needs of all their students.

Well, that's hardly rocket science! It's simple common sense that every practitioner knows from experience. But the Ministry's advice to the Minister is to tighten the boot straps:

Government should investigate stronger professional standards for principals, improving appointment and appraisal processes for school principals ...

Moreover, there are up-coming opportunities that could also help tighten others' bootstraps:

Major teacher collective employment agreements expire in 2010. Negotiations provide opportunity for the government to focus on more effective teaching practices.

And:

Introducing more specific requirements for teacher registration would create stronger incentives for initial teacher education providers to focus programme content on what works to improve student achievement.

Much of the tone and detail of the Briefing is consistent with what might be expected from the Minister's servants who work for the Minister in the Minister's Ministry. It is suitably grey suited. After all, they have to get along together, and the Government does have policy on National Literacy and Numeracy Standards, and at the end of the day it is the Government that is in charge. Its Ministry does quite bravely tell the Minister that we have for some time now been hoisting the literacy and numeracy flags to heights that might well surpass those of the early 20th Century (the reader won't recall the Proficiency Examinations in Primary Schools). In some schools that is now their whole curriculum *raison d'être*. Are we winning?

There is not much in this Briefing that would excite or nourish the minds of potential or experienced classroom teachers, but of course the paper wasn't written for them. The paper does, however, inevitably influence the sort of mentality of the environment in which the teacher is expected to engage the minds and actions of our young people. It is all very well to say that, “The Ministry has placed particular emphasis on high-quality teaching, as the evidence shows that this is the most powerful lever in schools to improve student achievement”. What is needed is an inspirational context for high-quality teaching – not merely a synthetic technicist one with some very narrow sights. I believe there is such a context, and it is the revised New Zealand Curriculum. It offers huge potential for rich teaching and learning in ways that value our considerable diversity and differences in this little yet changing nation. But alas, the new curriculum received a tiddly one line with eighteen words out of hundreds of lines and thousands of words in the Briefing: “The new curriculum better reflects the needs of young people today and is highly regarded in the sector”.

See what I mean! So where do you look for vision, vitality and inspiration? For me, it has to be from within the teaching profession – not the education bureaucrazy. ■

Feedback, feedforward, feedup, feiddown to lester.flockton@otago.ac.nz

