

Sabbatical Report

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The Road to Resilience

Te Huarahi Aumangea

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to Donna Walker and the rest of the staff who were so effective in leading the school during my absence. Thanks also to the leaders, teachers and experts who so freely shared their experience and expertise during my visits and interviews.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Ministry of Education for giving me the opportunity to undertake sabbatical leave. This time of reflection, research and refreshment has been very beneficial.

There are many others who made a great contribution to my learning and thinking behind the work described in my report. The staff of Totara Grove School work hard to make a positive difference in the lives of the tamariki. Being part of the I Have a Dream project provides a unique layer of support for tamariki reinforcing high aspirations, closely aligned with and enhancing the kaupapa of the school. The expert partners, mentors and advisers from Springboard Trust strengthened my understanding of strategic planning and provided opportunities for creative and innovative thinking. Involvement in Te Ara Hou (The Maori Achievement Collaborative), challenged and supported me to consider culture first and to keep Te Ao Maori in my consciousness.

Background and rationale

Four years ago, I began my principalship at Totara Grove school. This marked the start of the journey towards re-visioning the school. A friendly and caring school culture provided a solid foundation on which to build a vision for the future.

Research, consultation and collaboration with staff, students and the community identified a number of opportunities for growth and improvement. There was a need for the strategic direction to fully reflect and embrace the identity and cultures of the student population, seventy-three percent of whom are Māori. Another focus area became addressing the needs of the students with challenging behaviour - students with little or no resilience, who if anything went wrong, would “blow their top” (impulsive, out of control reactions and behaviour) and often refusing to engage in learning.

The school motto of “Tupu Tahi - Growing Together” was revised and strengthened, becoming the school vision of “Tupu Tahi - Growing Together - Standing Strong - Reaching High”. A set of values and guiding principles were introduced - “Ngā Mātāpono” - Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Ako and Tū Rangatira.

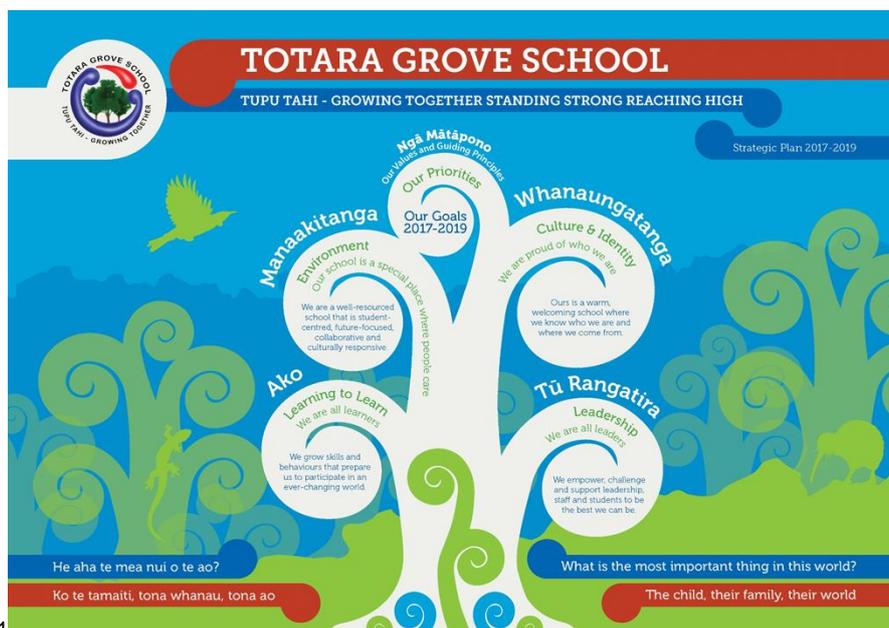


Figure 1

This was inspired by [Angus Macfarlane's educultural wheel](#) and [Dr Melinda Webber's research](#) on Māori student success and giftedness. The strategic direction for the next few years was linked directly to these principles and worded in simple language to be explicit and easily understood by the whole learning community, including the tamariki (Figure 1). These changes were readily adopted and the language of “Ngā Mātāpono” soon became the norm. The values and principles of Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Ako and Tū Rangatira are now at the centre of everything we do.

Through “Ngā Mātāpono”, the emphasis on building student pride in their culture and identity and on developing leaders made an immediate positive impact on engagement, achievement and whānau participation.

Every child is supported to learn about their whakapapa, to know their pepeha and take part in powhiri and whakatau. As student and staff confidence grows, the school is increasingly becoming a more bi-cultural environment.

Staff professional development in neuro-science, learning about the effects of trauma on the brain also had a positive effect. Teachers and support staff gained a deeper understanding of the challenging behaviour demonstrated by some of the tamariki. Manaakitanga and whanaungatanga became more evident in the school environment with the increased emphasis on power-sharing and growing relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Developing self esteem, resilience and social/emotional competencies has become a focus within the curriculum. [“The Zones of Regulation”](#) were introduced as a framework to help students foster self-regulation and emotional control. This approach is based on a book of the same name by Leah Kuypers. Teachers are also using a range of other wellbeing and resilience-building activities. Students are learning to identify emotions and use practical strategies to manage themselves and bounce back when they experience sadness, difficulties, frustrations and challenging times. We are working hard on providing learning conditions that positively influence student mindset and self-efficacy. There is a positive, settled tone in the school.

The next steps are to embed these cultural/social/emotional competencies within the school culture and curriculum and to build on extending the positive mindsets and self-efficacy into academic learning. The sabbatical provides opportunities for research, reflection and planning for next steps.

Guiding questions

- How can cultural and social/emotional competencies be successfully sustained and embedded within the school curriculum and culture?
- How can resilience be built at school?
- Can the success in social/emotional competencies transfer/translate to academic learning/thinking competencies?
- Where will this learning be positioned in our school curriculum in the future?

Findings

Creating culturally-responsive environments is essential for all New Zealand schools. Under the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori students have a right to learn in an environment that is culturally-safe for themselves and their whanau.

At Totara Grove School, with seventy-three percent Maori students, it is a priority to celebrate Māori culture and identity, to allow and enable students to be proud of who and what they are, to learn in an environment where Te Ao Māori is visible and respected. In Angus Macfarlane's [educultural wheel \(2004\)](#), five interweaving dimensions are identified as essential in an inclusive school culture –

whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga, rangatiratanga and pumanawatanga. All these dimensions are incorporated in the Totara Grove School values and guiding principles “Ngā Mātāpono”.

A strong, positive school culture is evident.

A culturally responsive school curriculum is informed by Doctor Melinda Webber's Ka Awatea research about sources of mana and factors influencing Māori student success and the subsequent development of The Mana Model:

Mana Tangatarua - The skills, knowledge and confidence to navigate success in two (or more) worlds.

Mana Tū- Efficacy, courage, humility, tenacity and resilience.

Mana Motuhake - A positive Māori identity and a sense of embedded achievement.

Mana Ūkaipō- Belonging and connection to place.

Mana Whānau- A belief that they occupy a central position of importance in their whānau.

(Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae (2014)).

The needs of the non-Māori students are also important. With a strong emphasis on an inclusive school culture and reflective, inquiry-based teaching, all students have the opportunity to thrive and reach their potential. Research clearly reinforces the famous quote by [Russell Bishop](#) that "What is good for Māori students is good for everyone".

Challenging behaviour can be a sign that a child has experienced trauma in their lives - an incident, or series of incidents that cause physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological harm. Any child can experience trauma, but a particularly vulnerable group are those growing up in an environment affected by poverty, family dysfunction, domestic abuse, mental health issues and drug or alcohol addiction.

Neuro-scientists have identified that children who have experienced trauma early in their lives are likely to be compromised in the lower regions of the brain. They have a weak foundation when it comes to brain organisation, affecting emotional regulation, impulse control and making it difficult to learn. When they become alarmed or stressed, they will withdraw or the fight or flight mechanism will be easily engaged. This brain function can be improved when children grow and learn in a safe, calm and nurturing environment. Staff become more understanding when they know that children "blowing their top" is a physiological response to a situation, rather than an act of aggression. Improved relationships based on mutual trust, respect and power-sharing leads to less conflict and misunderstanding.

A programme was introduced as a framework to equip students with strategies to use when dealing with emotions and develop self-control - "The Zones of Regulation". This approach is based on a book of the same name by Leah Kuypers. The programme was highly recommended by the Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour and the school became part of a cluster of four schools "Hauora Wananga" implementing the "Zones of Regulation" school-wide. All schools report that the programme has made a positive difference. Though the programme was originally designed to be used in a special education context, all agree that using the programme school-wide has been successful. The consistency of language and approach improves self-efficacy in all students and provides a framework for problem-solving and conflict resolution, often without the need for adult intervention.

Some comments from principals:

- There is a sense of calmness, less confrontation.
- There is a changed mindset among the staff - they see the benefits.
- Staff and students feel more empowered and less stressed.
- The emotional literacy bank is getting stronger.
- There is a consistent approach -everyone is speaking the same language.
- This is about learning and growing, not discipline.

All agreed that their schools would be continuing with the programme, looking to embed the language and actions within the school culture and curriculum.

Current research affirms the strategic direction of Totara Grove School. Over the past four years, there has been a steady improvement in student engagement and achievement. The increased focus on cultural responsiveness, building self esteem, resilience and social/emotional competencies is making a positive impact.

The link between engagement and achievement is very strong - students do not learn well if they do not feel safe at school - culturally, socially, emotionally, physically or spiritually. The improvement in

achievement is also linked to teacher effectiveness. Achieving success in learning is an important element in building student self esteem and self-efficacy. Teachers work hard to ensure that students are actively involved in their learning, that teaching is culturally responsive, interactive, dialogic and iterative.

Professional development supports this approach -

- Maths -building content knowledge and active learning within mixed-ability groups.
- [Relationships-based learning](#)- culturally responsive teaching to accelerate progress and achievement of marginalised groups.

Teachers collaborate and coach each other in meeting the expectations of the effective teacher profile.

The concept of building resilience formed a large part of my research. It was clear to me that learning self-control and strategies to manage emotions was helping students develop confidence and a sense of belonging at school. Engagement in learning was also improving, though sometimes at a very basic level. For this growth mindset to be maintained and apply to learning as well as behaviour, students will need determination and resilience. Can resilience be built at school and if so, how?

The Education Review Office worked with a Kahui Ako to answer that very question. ERO developed testing across two thousand learners for four important components of resilience: belonging, growth mindset, self-efficacy and “grit”. Their findings were published in a short one-page [report](#). As expected, ERO’s analysis found a clear link between resilience and doing well at school. Students who rated themselves highly for grit in particular did better academically.

ERO asserts that in educational psychology, grit is a key indicator of future prosperity and wellbeing. Their definition of grit is

“Perseverance and passion for long term goals” .

ERO’s practical advice to schools to help students build resilience and do well at school-

- *Help children succeed by giving them a variety of learning strategies to apply if they are having difficulty (so they can try again)*
- *Create an environment where asking for help is a positive trait and experience*
- *Praise and admire perseverance and grit*
- *Teach the concept of “failing up” (our failures give us the information we need to succeed)*
- *Support high expectations.*

Another useful resource recommended in the ERO report is [Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners](#), a literature review by the University of Chicago on *The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance (June 2012)*.

This publication gives little mention to resilience specifically, but a great deal of attention to “grit”, “mindset” and “self control” (aligning with ERO’s definition of important components of resilience).

The authors found strong evidence that mindsets affect student performance. Strong, positive mindsets make students much more likely to engage with academic work, demonstrate positive academic behaviours and persist despite setbacks. They also found that academic mindsets are malleable- that the learning environment and relationships have a strong influence on academic mindsets. When students feel a sense of belonging, believe in themselves and have high expectations for themselves, they are more likely to persist at academic tasks. Classrooms that emphasise co-operation and a sense that everyone can achieve are more likely to develop self-efficacy in students than competitive, hierarchical environments. This aligns with Macfarlane’s educultural wheel, The Mana model and Ngā Mātāpono.

The research shows that mindsets can be positively influenced at school and that the way to achieve this is through effective teaching within an inclusive, success based learning environment. The recommendations for conditions that promote strong student engagement and positive academic mindsets are closely matched with universally-used effective teaching profiles based on the ten characteristics of quality teaching identified in [Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis](#) (2003) including providing authentic, meaningful learning contexts, student agency, high expectations and feedback.

ERO findings listed the four important components of resilience as: belonging, growth mindset, self-efficacy and grit. The research affirms our current directions including the first three (belonging, growth mindset and self-efficacy).

“Grit” is less explicit within the curriculum. The definition of grit as “perseverance and passion for long term goals”, places it in pedagogy. Through using “Learning through Play” and personalised learning, opportunities are provided for students to discover their passions and talents. According to Angela Duckworth, TED Talk presenter and author of the book [“Grit Why passion and resilience are the secrets to success”](#), grit is the “x-factor” difference between talent and greatness. She explores the concept of “nature versus nurture”. Talents are genetically influenced, however talent alone doesn’t lead to success. Grit is about perseverance, but not *just* working very hard. “Grit is about working on something you care so much about that you are willing to stay loyal to it”.

According to Duckworth, grit can be grown. From within, grit can be grown by cultivating interests, by practising, challenging yourself, connecting your work to a greater good and retaining a sense of hope. However, developing grit critically depends on other people-parents, teachers, coaches, mentors and friends.

This reinforces ERO’s suggested resilience-building strategies of developing perseverance through keeping trying, explicitly acknowledging effort and grit and learning from mistakes. ERO’s advice is practical and achievable.

One of my guiding questions referred to translating learning in cultural/social/emotional competencies to academic learning. There is definitely a relationship between the two. However, the University of Chicago report on Teaching Adolescents to become Learners and Russell Bishop’s findings in the Te Kotahitanga project remind us - students who lack perseverance and study skills may be misperceived as not caring and lacking motivation. In fact these students often lack mindsets and strategies that would help them learn. These students need support to develop positive academic mindsets and explicit teaching of effective learning strategies. We need to create the environment and contexts for that learning to happen.

Conclusion

A grounding principle of educational psychology is that interpersonal and academic learning are interdependent. This is demonstrated by Macfarlane’s educultural wheel representing the interactions between inclusive practice, effective pedagogy and pumananawatanga (morale, tone, pulse). All components of resilience - belonging, growth mindset, self-efficacy and grit are integral to the Totara Grove School guiding principles and values of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, ako and tū rangatira.

There is a need to continue to support the development of cultural/social/emotional competencies as well as academic competencies. They go together. We are teaching the whole person and hopefully helping them to be a better person.

In the words of Yong Zhao

”A lot of education is not about knowledge, it’s about being a better person.”

To help our students build resilience, we need to go on keeping the values of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, ako and tū rangatira at the forefront of everything we do. We need to support, challenge and guide our tamariki to thrive in an ever-changing world within a safe, inclusive, culturally responsive and future focused environment.

In the words of Dame Whina Cooper

“Manaakitia ā tātou tamariki
Manaakitia ngā me aka kitea
Manaakitia ngā e aka aria
Ko te tupuria o ngā tamariki
Arā, ko te kanohi o Aotearoa.

*“Take care of our children
Take care of what they see
Take care of what they hear
Take care of what they see
Take care of what they feel.
For how the children grow, so will be
the shape of Aotearoa.”*

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