

June 2009



Newsletter

Special points of interest:

- Student voice
 - ◆ Why?
 - ◆ A learning tool
 - ◆ A learning opportunity
 - ◆ Using the knowledge
- National Standards



What can 'student voice' teach us? Developing dispositions and encouraging school well-being

Kia ora tatou, talofa lava, malo e lelei, greetings.

Value of student voice questioned

Research into the views and opinions of the student body of a school can be both fruitful and liberating, yet it is a step that seems difficult for some teachers to contemplate. For some, it distracts from the 'main' job of teaching. Some teachers and senior leaders may even question the value or purpose in a way that suggests that up to the point of suggestion, this is a strategy that had not even been contemplated before.

Democratic dispositions

It is breathtaking that in a supposedly democratic state student voice is not more widely canvassed. Teachers will wax lyrical about how they are in the job of preparing their students 'for the future', or are engaged in helping their students become 'lifelong learners'; schools will boast in their vision statements of a bold future in which their students feature prominently.

Yet, for all these high-flown statements and intentions, the very simple act of providing students opportunities to develop democratic dispositions is

overlooked. 'Voter apathy' is often bemoaned, but for many, their first-ever opportunity to express an important opinion is when they are 18 or older.

Student voice ~ a learning opportunity

Not only is it bizarre to ignore or neglect an important step in the learning process of young people, it is wasteful to turn up the learning opportunities that arise from processes such as consulting students. This is learning that benefits students, teachers and schools.

Students who are consulted authentically about issues will take ownership of those matters - they will feel they have played a part in resolving the problem or developing the solution. Teachers will learn and glean information and knowledge they did not previously have which could give them a new perspective. Schools can respond more effectively, knowing that they have a fuller picture of the issue at hand.

A school may, for example, discover after consulting students regarding relationships, that not all students are necessarily so positive in their relationships either with each other or with their teachers, as previously thought. Or it may realise that not all students think that getting

on with others requires special skills.

Using the knowledge

What a school does with this new knowledge is as important as having taken the trouble to get the information in the first place. If the views are merely 'outlier', that is representative of a small portion of the group, they may only be worth noting and keeping an eye on, but if the view is significant (such as in excess of 1/3rd) then it should be more closely examined.

This could entail deeper questioning around the unexpected response or the strongly-held student view. This could take the form of surveys or direct classroom interaction around these issues.

Once more clearly established as an issue for deeper consideration by the school, suitable strategies should be contemplated and implemented. These need to be reviewed after a suitable period to ascertain their success.

Not only does canvassing student voice give students authentic opportunities to develop democratic dispositions, it gives a school invaluable information about itself, and adds to its institutional wisdom and overall health.

National Standards debate

Look at *Education Review*, Vol 14, no 22, for an article published there on the issue of standards and league tables. The article will appear on the Mockingbird website (www.mockingbird.co.nz) soon. Martin Thrupp also expressed some interesting points in an article carried by *The Education Weekly* (Eduvac) on the 2nd and 8th June.



**MOCKINGBIRD
EDUCATION MANAGEMENT
CONSULTANTS**

Po Box 54220
Bucklands Beach
2144

Phone & Fax: +64 9 537 6773
Mob: 027 433 8330
info@mockingbird.co.nz

Mockingbird Education Management Consultants has been established to provide high quality professional advice, service and support to New Zealand schools.

It is a consultancy based on:

- Trust
- Quality
- Professionalism

Mockingbird understands that:

- Principals and Senior Managers are busy professionals
- Middle Managers need support and guidance
- Schools have to achieve results

Therefore, Mockingbird will work closely with you to identify the advice, service or support you require and how best to deliver that to you, your senior managers, staff or school community.

From pg 1

At time of writing, the Minister has sensibly put the implementation of standards on hold. The debate seems however to be far more pre-occupied by the furore over 'league tables'.

More recently, the *New Zealand Herald* weighed into the debate, urging league tables as a positive step. This led to some interesting talk-back opinion. What is remarkable about this editorialising and public opinion is the extent to which it seems to be based on ignorance of at least two points:

- ◆ Tables of results (we're talking of children's lives here, not the local tennis club) rely on common sources of information, ascertained in similar ways under similar conditions
- ◆ These tables will tell us nothing new

Even with 'national standards' unless there is a national exam at a set age (example age 10 and 12) that assesses the same material in the same way, there can be no reliable basis of comparison on which to base a table of results.

An important reason why groups like the NZEI and Principal's Federation have protested is that schools required by geographic and demographic circumstance to draw on the students who come to school lacking the background in literacy and numeracy of their higher decile counterparts will inevitably be shown in a negative light by such tables.

Sadly, much public opinion is fired by voices who are not only ignorant, but who base their 'expertise' on their (now distant) years on the other side of 'the big desk'.

Happy Holidays!!!

Business Activity

June 09

Business Activity

- Beginning Teacher development
- Appraisals (Principal level)
- Teacher Only Days on the NZC
- On-going NZC implementation work
- BOT consultation on NZC
- BOT consultation on new Principal Appointment process

June 09

Client Schools

- James Cook High School
- Kowhai Intermediate
- St Dominic's College
- Kaikohe West School
- Whangarei Intermediate School
- Holy Family School, Porirua
- St Pius X School
- Park Estate School
- St Mary's School, Avondale
- Whau Valley School, Whangarei
- Kaikohe Christian School
- Wesley College
- Elim Christian College

Mockingbird Education Management Consultants is focussed on delivering **QUALITY OUTCOMES** to schools - call today to arrange a free consultation.