

FOCUS:

To investigate the Virtues Project as developed by Linda Kavelin Popov, Dan Popov and John Kavelin

SABBATICAL REPORT

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Historical background to the Sabbatical

Over my years at Frankton we had developed a strong cohesive teaching and learning community based on aroha and respect. We had not developed values based programmes but had a shared vision that encapsulated beliefs and values. In December 2004 a pamphlet came across my desk advertising a character development programme based on The Virtues which included the following strategies:- **Speaking the Language of the Virtues, Recognising Teachable Moments, Setting Clear Boundaries, Honouring the Spirit and Offering Spiritual Companionship**. As an educator I had always been interested in spirituality and so I immediately connected with this programme. Three staff members and I went to this course and we knew instantly that this was a universal programme that would fit into our inclusive philosophy at Frankton. Fortunately at the time our school psychologist was a facilitator of the Virtues Project and ran a course to which we sent nine other staff members who were equally as impressed with the programme's possibilities for our staff, students and community. We now had a critical mass of at least thirteen teachers including the four senior leaders who knew about the Virtues Project and had begun speaking the language of the Virtues, with students and each other and experimenting with the other four strategies. I continued to role model by having a set of virtue cards in my office and the "Thinking Room" for children to use to find the Virtue they needed to grow when there was an issue. Over half of our staff was experimenting with this programme and I decided to develop a Virtues Action Learning programme so that I could assist and support further growth and development within our school.

Action Research Cycle

Reflection: How are other schools implementing this programme? Does it make a difference to the culture of the community? What factors ensure its success?

Plan & Action: To apply for a sabbatical to visit schools operating "*The Virtues Project*" as written by Linda Kavelin Popov with Dan Popov and John Kavelin and to begin training as a facilitator. The aim in training in-depth was so I could support teacher and parents to focus on a child's gifts and possibilities using this empowerment model of character development. I contacted John Lukkassen RTLB Palmerston North who arranged visits to **Our Lady of Lourdes School, Awapuni School**, a meeting with **Dr Shane Harvey** Massey University, **Di Wilson** from **Awatapu College**, and a visit to **Shannon Primary**. For this help John asked if I would do a workshop for principals on our Journey beginning 2005 with the virtues

and I presented this on the 20th of October, “A *gentle wave of virtue, the virtues project at Frankton School Hamilton.*” **Almost all** of my staff gave me activities to share at this workshop of what they were using to support the implementation of the virtues project within their classroom. The scale of operation already happening gave me great courage.

I gleaned many ideas from these visits and was especially heartened to learn of the research through a Virtues Questionnaire developed for **Awatapu College by Dr Shane Harvey** Massey University Psychology Clinic. He and Dianne Wilson had designed a list of behaviours relating directly to the virtues, at transition points i.e. Y9s and 10s. Twenty Growth virtues were identified and examples of behaviours related to the virtue identified. For example:-

Think back carefully about the last two weeks. For those last two weeks, please circle the number that best fits what best describes you and how you behaved in class:		Not at all	Sometimes	Quite a bit	All the time
RESPECT	I answered the teacher back.	1	2	3	4
	I followed the school rules.	1	2	3	4
	In difficult situations, I thought about what I said before I said it.	1	2	3	4
	I spoke nicely to others.	1	2	3	4
CONFIDENCE	I gave things a go.	1	2	3	4
	I learnt from my mistakes.	1	2	3	4
	I asked teachers for help when I didn't understand the instruction.	1	2	3	4
	Because the concept we were learning was so difficult, I asked the teacher for help.	1	2	3	4

In time personal goals were set by these High School students, based on the data and reported on in a Log Book. Results showed evidence of fewer students on daily report just as data from primary schools showed less children on Detention or in The Thinking Room. We discussed the ultimate of children internalising the virtues without extrinsic rewards and how teachers shape and grow children emotionally. We also talked about adults being stunted emotionally, and how to get teachers to model these growth virtues identified, because the confidence of the teacher impacts on the student's respect. Shane also clarified for me the thinking behind the Behaviourist model because I had identified it as a stumbling block to understand the concept of looking behind the *intent* of the behaviour to find the virtue. Behaviourists look at the function of the environment rather than the individual. They see the reason for the behaviour as perhaps the need for the person to escape something, attention seeking and why, to gain something or looking for motivation for why a child is behaving badly. Whereas the Virtues accept children like an acorn, which has the capacity to become a towering oak because that is their potential. All children are born with all the virtues, the gifts within, waiting to grow. What a child becomes is a result of four things:-

1. **Nature** – natural giftedness of virtues “profile” and all have this in potential to one degree or another.
2. **Nurturance** – how a child is educated, gifts recognised and supported. The difference between watering or left to wilt.
3. **Opportunity** – to act on their virtues give them the possibility to become who they are.
4. **Effort** – this is the child’s responsibility and his/her ability to respond to opportunities to practice the virtues. Ultimately it is the choice of the child to act on his/her own potential. Choice is at the core of moral will.

Ideas gleaned from other Primary Schools

All the schools I visited were smaller than ours and because of this, implementing the project across the school was easier to manage. One seven/eight teacher school used the following format for a virtue:- e.g. GENEROSITY

- Why do we practice it?
- How do we practice it? *On this side of the book*
- What does it look like? *was the chart on the*
- What do you hear? *Virtue of Generosity*
- How do you feel?
- What can we do as a class to practice it?

Another nine teacher school used metaphors for each area of the school to encapsulate their classroom philosophy and the essence of the virtues. The metaphor gave a depth to expression of the virtues for e.g. **“The Orchard”**. When I asked the children why they called their room the orchard they gave answers like “it’s here that we grow and learn, we care for one another, we produce fruits, the teacher plants the seeds, there are no noxious weeds here, it’s an organic orchard, and the teacher added that he didn’t have to do much pruning and no spraying!” A junior area was called **“The Launching Pad”**, a site where learners launch themselves to achieve their goals etc. **Learners Unlimited** was the third area where children stated they were no longer known as room four because learners in this room are not limited by a number. They said they were unlimited in what they strive to achieve and the statement on the door said “Please support us in our quest for unlimited excellence in all areas of our lives. Another classroom was called **“Middle Earth”** and had **“The Treaty of the Fellowship”** with virtues that were important and what these virtues looked like.

Another nine teacher decile one school modelled the staff commitment to the Virtues Project by having an attractive Staff Notice Board. Early in the year some senior students interviewed all staff and took a digital photo. The staff member shared their Mihi (in this school they were in Maori) and their strength virtues and virtues they needed to grow. Beside each photo was recorded the above. The display was stunning and reflected the staff member’s personality. It placed the Virtues at the heart of the school and modelled that adults were still growing virtues too! There were many different examples displaying the virtue of the week or fortnight along with each child’s strength and growth virtues.

Deepening in The Virtues – 20 hour Facilitator Intensive Workshop 23rd-25th September 2005 New Plymouth.

This experience was to take me personally to another level so I could mentor and support others in our Frankton Learning Community. The model for learning used at

this course was a useful way for me to understand what happens when we go to learn something new at any age/stage of our life! Moving from:-

1. Unconsciously Incompetent – We don't know what we don't know
2. Consciously Incompetent – We know what we don't know
3. Consciously Competent – Self-talk, reinforce what we know
4. Unconsciously Competent – Integrated skills and knowledge – “natural”, second nature

The facilitator took us through the five strategies of the Virtues Project at a deeper level than a one or two day course. I now have a small tool box of skills for “Teachable Moments” for example, move from Naming, Shaming to calling a Virtue, using authority in the service of the child's learning, looking at family boundaries, simple steps for spiritual health, and how do we keep ourselves safe and respecting diversity.

Reflection: What did I learn?

- That the culture of Frankton was conducive to implementing this programme school wide.
- Schools I visited that had implemented the Project had changed learning and behaviour patterns.
- The project increased the likelihood of a school being a safe, happy, learning environment.
- The project can be successful school wide beginning with New Entrants as seen in several schools.
- The strategies of the Project compliment Restorative Justice practice.
- The Project across the whole school is only successful if the Principal and key leaders believe in it and model the strategies.
- Already Frankton Primary was well on the way with 2005 as a year for experimenting with the Virtues.
- Teachers were working at building a conscience in children and used virtues as guidance before an action, and virtues as correction after an inappropriate action had happened.
- The purpose is not to shame a student into changing behaviour but to touch the child's conscience and awaken the moral purpose of the change that is called for.
- I learnt how to ‘Create circles of influence’ with the Virtues Project by little activities that influences families.

Plan: What will I do now to encourage school wide implementation?

1. *Ensure my own background theory/knowledge about the programme is solid and reasons for encouraging implementation are strong.*

Demographics in New Zealand show an increasing trend towards a more bicultural/multicultural mix and yet schools are ill prepared to meet this challenge. Many well known reformers in the past such as Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and Paola Freire have called for an education that prepares us for democracy rather than authoritarianism and fosters ethical and caring relationships among our diversity. I believe the Virtues Project by Linda Popov is one way of achieving this. I have always avoided programmes concerned with values and morals believing these to be cultural and religious based and we have diverse cultures and religions within our organisations. This project is a natural, practical extension of

my 2002 Master's study "**Philosophy, Spirituality, Power and Authenticity in Primary School Leadership**". Terry (1993) and Vaill (1998) argued for something deeper than philosophy in leadership, to cope with the complexities of the new millennium and the five strategies of the Virtues Project is an empowerment model for this. O'Grady (1994) believed that "if we are to be truly multicultural, then we must acknowledge that many individuals have spiritual beliefs that provide as much meaning as one's ethnicity, gender, social class, or other forms of identity." The Virtues are the content of our character, the elements of the human spirit existing in potential within us all. The Virtues Project is not about the practice or beliefs of any particular religion but is based on the world's diverse cultures and religions about living by the best within us – courage, honour, justice, kindness and all of our innate virtues. These virtues are the silver thread that runs through all the sacred texts of the world binding humanity together. This is a universal programme.

2. *Share with Frankton Staff the ideas gleaned from the Palmerston North Visit to reflect on in preparation for implementation across the school in 2006.*
3. *Attend Taupo Virtues Mentorship Course and make connections with other schools close by who are operating the Virtues Project.*
4. *Send a group of committed teachers to the schools in Taupo that implement the Virtues Project to fact find and report back to the rest of the staff.*
5. *Keep writing snippets about the Virtues at Frankton in the school's fortnightly newsletter.*
6. *Keep monitoring behaviour target in the Charter to see if the virtues work is having an impact on the level of aggression in the playground.*
7. *Weave the story of the virtues into Principal's message at the Y6 Leaving Ceremony.*

Reflection: What happened? What did we learn?

The team that went to investigate the Taupo schools came back highly motivated and affirmed the rest of the staff that we as a team were well on our way with whole school Virtues. They presented a workshop to the rest of the staff with a Power Point of ideas gleaned from the schools visited and began to develop a plan of action for school implementation in 2006 which included:-

- Inclusion of the Virtues Project in the philosophy of 2006 Frankton School Charter.
- Another Behavioural Target included in the Charter to monitor the impact of the Virtues Programme on student behaviour.
- An Implementation Plan for classroom delivery of this programme.
- The Formation of a Team of teachers across the school who will lead the Virtues Project.
- This Team facilitated a workshop on Teacher Only Day on how they have instigated aspects of the virtues in their classroom and how they have integrated this with the schools Pupil Management Plan based on "Rights and Responsibilities."
- The principal facilitated two in-depth sessions for staff on Teacher Only Day from what she had learnt at the Facilitators Intensive Workshop.
- One of the goals in the Principal's Job Description is to continue to develop the virtue of UNITY which encompasses all the strategies of the Virtues Project.

- We will experiment with using the 5 strategies in mentoring and coaching at all levels in Frankton Primary.

This Action Research is ongoing. For me personally I have the opportunity this year to attend International Virtues Mentorship in Brisbane over the July holidays and will attend workshops with Linda and Dan Popov. This will further deepen my knowledge. Reporting on our targets to the Ministry for 2005 show a reduction in aggressive behaviour in the playground and in children having time in the ‘Virtues Thinking Room’ to which we attribute to the work of our character development plan, The Virtues. Our Charter goal for Term One 2006 was to reduce the number of physical incidents during lunchtime to 35 per term in the Thinking Room and two or less per individual.

Year	Total Number of incidents	Number of physical incidents	Number of boys	Number of Girls	
Term One 2005	97	58	54	4	The Virtues Programme had only begun to be trialled with 3 teachers.
Term One 2006	39	26	36	1	Staff Development for whole staff T.O.D.

Overall 2005: 258 children were in the Thinking Room during lunchtimes.

Term One: 58 out of 97 incidents were physical i.e. 60%

Term Two: 30 out of 56 incidents were physical i.e. 53%

Term Three: 23 out of 50 incidents were physical i.e. 46%

Term Four: 25 out of 55 incidents were physical i.e. 45%

By the time I gave my Virtues Workshop in Palmerston North on the 20th of October 20 classrooms out of 24 were experimenting with the strategies from the Virtues Project and this down trend in physical incidents could be attributed to their efforts.

Other factors which have impacted on the decline of physical incidents are:-

- The introduction of a shortened lunchtime – 12.25 – 12.35pm sit down to eat with classroom teacher supervising, 12.35pm – 1.15pm for lunchtime playing activities.
- Competitive interclass games (per middle and senior syndicates) during the lunchtimes.
- Peer Mediators (Year 4 and 5s) are on duty with two being visible in Junior, Middle and Senior areas, helping children to solve problems and giving out Virtue Certificates to peers demonstrating a virtue.
- Teachers on duty give Certificates acknowledging a virtue in action.
- Virtue Cards are selected from each Syndicate’s box and read out at fortnightly whole school assemblies with the child’s name, the virtue and the action and vouchers given.
- Syndicates have purchased \$300 of PE gear for the children to use during the playtimes.
- Reduced number of teachers in the ‘Virtues Thinking Room’ to only one teacher each lunchtime, allowing the other teacher to engage in focused soccer games during lunchtime.

- Completed Virtue Letters as a consequence of being in ‘The Virtues Thinking Room’ have been sent home in the mail.
- Due to repeated physical actions, two boys have had ‘play in-school suspension’ whereby they have had their own isolated playtime and then worked during the official playtimes in ‘The Virtues Thinking Room’ under the supervision of the principal on writing, or drawing the virtue they need to grow, what it looks like, how they practice it etc.
- Several boys have received ‘focused play’ during the term, whereby they have lost the privilege of free play in the playground and have been involved in supervised soccer games with the AP.
- Experienced teachers in the ‘Virtues Thinking Room’ who have the knowledge of Restorative Justice practices and the five strategies of the Virtues.
- Staff have worked together to relate each of the ‘Core Competencies’ to a group of virtues and developed an Implementation Plan based on the Virtues Project for the whole school.

Conclusion

Over the last two years **resilience** has come to be recognised as an important part of a child’s development and when a child’s emotional resilience is delayed it makes it harder for them to respond positively to difficult situations. Professor Michael Bernard founder and creator of the ‘*You Can Do It Education Programme*,’ calls this a ‘social emotional capability,’ as distinct from academic and the cognitive. However, adults and children are all living in pressurised times with increasing numbers of family break downs. People are experiencing fragmentation, and the numbing of their pain often results in high dependency on drugs and suicide. Within Frankton Primary we encourage everyone to be a leader. Vaill (1998, p.95) believes that true leadership is spiritual leadership and that learning for leadership needs to occur at a personal and profound level of spirituality if a person is to have the resources and “the resilience to lead under trying modern conditions.”

The Virtues Project strategies builds resiliency, as it focuses on the child’s gifts and possibilities, sees the best the child is able to grow and supports the child to set clear boundaries and develop their strengths. This is done through speaking the language of the virtues, recognising teachable moments, honouring the spirit and spiritual companionship. Companionship is a powerful tool for developing resiliency in that it gives the person an opportunity to express their feelings openly, with someone who is present to them by active listening, and offering clarifying questions which help them to find their own wisdom. It strengthens their resiliency by calling on the virtues at the heart of the matter. *“To’ listen’ to another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.”* Douglas V. Steere.

Coleman’s (1995,p33) term ‘emotional intelligence’ is about cultivating children’s emotional and social skills. In doing so we give them decided advantages in their cognitive abilities, in their personal adjustment, and in their resiliency through life. The Virtues Programme is a spiritual tool for this. Coleman’s (1994) emotional intelligence and Gardner’s (1993) inter-personal and intra-personal intelligence gave focus to the ‘relationship’ aspect of education. They were instrumental in getting people to think beyond the intellectual fixed quotient, to a more holistic model

involving several intelligences thereby giving people a sense of connection with many different facets of their life.

The Virtues Project supports our schools' **commitment to a dual cultural heritage in New Zealand under the Treaty of Waitangi**, with the principles of participation, protection and partnership. The virtues have been translated into Maori. Through the five strategies of this programme the unique position of the Maori culture is honoured and other cultures valued, acknowledged and reflected through 'acting out' the virtues in their own manner through group practice of whanaungatanga and Manaakitanga. Using the concepts of "see it, think it, do it." This programme has been trialled with indigenous cultures in Canada, America and the Cook Islands and compliments their ways of seeing the world. It honours the spirit of the human being and brings back the wairua, the spirituality which makes the practice holistic. The students' physical, mental and emotional safety is protected through such a programme. The practice of the virtues is '**evidence based practice**' and is safe and best practice for children and staff. It is **sustainable**, in that once strategies are modelled, taught and practiced they become a part of who the person is. The Virtues Project is based on building a conscience in our students through naming NOT shaming, mentorship NOT censorship, reflection NOT rejection, restoration NOT retribution.

The Virtues Project compliments a **Restorative approach** to managing student behaviour and relationships in that it is a collaborative approach. It is one where people are mindful of their position and power and collaborate in experiencing themselves as having agency, the ability to act on decisions, having power. Restorative conversations are about managing relationships by speaking differently, asking curious questions which helps to obtain a clear perspective of the different roles or positions in the story. **Often it is the negative, deficit description of a person viewed as the one true total account of all the experiences of that person that prevents him or her breaking out of their resistance, withdrawal and non-compliance.** This requires mentors to listen differently, identifying the stories and positions in them (revealing unsaid assumptions, values) and positioning and re-positioning through different responses. By using the language of the virtues, mentors are able to acknowledge, correct and thank without naming, blaming and shaming. Reflective practice is developed through compassionate listening or companioning. As people are allowed to tell their stories we appreciate the significance of the changes we might have made, or the virtues or skills that made those possible through hearing what their effects might have been on others.

Black & William's (1998) five key findings on **formative assessment** are also a focus within the Virtues Project.

1. **The provision of effective feedback to pupils** through "speaking the language of the virtues" which is specific, clear and most important of all easily internalized. It builds authentic self-esteem without over-dependence on approval. Giving specific virtues acknowledgement is different than making general statements of praise which can create guilt. For example it is not helpful to label a child in any way, positive or negative. We don't say "You're such a kind boy". We say "It was kind of you to show our new student where to sit. I'm sure it made him feel welcome." Using the word 'don't run or don't fight' focuses on running and fighting and doesn't give children a positive focus for what you want from them. Focus on what we

DO want them to do is far more likely to obtain positive results. Asking them to be considerate and walk in the hallways will encourage them to walk. By asking them to work something out peacefully encourages peacefulness.

2. It is about recognising the teachable moment and **the active involvement of students in their own learning** with children naming their strength virtues and virtues they are growing. Teachers have found it more meaningful if children wrote their own goals and then evaluated them separately for the week by reflecting on actions that show the virtue. Teachers model and encourage the language by providing scaffolding eg. I see your.....I honour you for your.....I acknowledge your.....That showed a lot of.....when you.....Thank you for your.....I honour you for the virtue of....when you.....
3. The **adjusting of teaching to take account of the results of assessment** happens within the Virtues programme through the teachable moment and by placing greater emphasis on ‘why do we practice the virtue, how do we practice the virtue, what does it look like, what would you hear, how would you feel and what can we do as a class to practice it?’
4. **Recognising the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils** is practiced through setting clear boundaries, honouring the spirit of the child, and believing the virtues are dormant within and it is the role of the mentor to reflect the practice as a model. Assessment through the language of the virtues is to stop misbehaviour, restore justice and build conscience. It is an educative model because it focuses on virtues rather than judgemental statements of good or bad; we are creating a context for behaviour, a climate of meaning.
5. **The need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve** is developed through companioning the child and through the power of language to awake the innate virtues in students, thereby bringing out the best in them. The mentor acknowledges or praises them for a virtue they have practiced guides or prepares them to practice a virtue and correct or remind them when they have ‘forgotten’ themselves and failed to practice a virtue.

Finally, as a result of this small study I feel affirmed in my long held view of working with virtues rather than a values programme. Why virtues and not values? It is because values are culture-specific and religion specific. What some families or cultures value, others don't. While values are culture-specific, virtues as written by Linda and Dan Popov are universally valued by all cultures. They are based on a study of the sacred texts of the religions of the world, such as Christianity, Mormonism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Bahai and the silver thread of unity that binds them all are the virtues. They are inclusive of all religions, beliefs and faiths. This is a successful way to introduce character education in a pluralistic society as the virtues are timeless and universal. The programme will not work in any school if the professional leaders do not believe and value its benefits. The Virtues Project has the ability to reverse the culture of violence within one generation if it became standard practice in our New Zealand schools. School leaders would need the virtues of courage and unity to develop moral and spiritual purpose and rethink ways of inclusive practice which will heal our fragmented communities.

Thomas Armstrong in “Awakening Genius in the Classroom” discusses aspects of the ‘genial teacher’ who like Michelangelo (saw the angel in the bare rock), sees the seeds of genius inside each student regardless of labels, psychological reports, test results, complaints from teachers and behaviours. It is about having a method to help children act on the best within them. The method is the five strategies of the Virtue Project which safeguards the educator from imposing the values of any one belief system, by supporting each one to develop the integrity of their character through universal virtues.

“I’ve seen so many programs come and go. They’re all band-aids. The Virtues Project is penicillin. It’s the cure.”

Linda Fess, Mayor of Piqua, Ohio.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Frankton School Charter

Appendix B: Frankton School Implementation Plan

Appendix C: Frankton School Student Management Booklet. (NOT PROVIDED ONLINE)

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