

Reflections on my trip to New Zealand

D. DeRose

The education exchange to New Zealand was everything, and more, than I had hoped. We visited twelve schools in New Zealand in the three week period we were there. I was the most impressed with the high profile the Maori language, culture and people had in their country.

The majority of the time I was in New Zealand schools we studied the Te Kotohitanga Project for year 9 and 10 students. We visited a language nest school and two elementary schools, but almost all of my observations are about that project.

1. REFLECTIONS

A) Significant Learnings

1. I learned that there is a significant commitment from all educators in New Zealand around Maori student success from the Ministry of Education (funding) to schools, teachers, parents, extended families and elders;
2. I learned that before “the project” was enacted there was a significant amount of time put into researching why Maori students were not achieving at the same rate as non-Maori students. Time was also given to interviewing students themselves and recommendations for the project came out of this;
3. I learned that there is only one language and culture for the Maori. They have their own television station and the government Minister for Maori is Maori;
4. I learned that the project has been monitored by the Ministry of Education. There has been a tremendous amount of money put into teaching teachers how to teach Maori children;
5. I learned that the Maori language and culture is prominent everywhere in New Zealand especially in schools;
6. I learned that every school approached maori education in different ways and with differing levels of commitment. This, it appeared, stemmed back to the school administration;
7. I learned that the enthusiasm for the project was infectious and teachers who were involved got their peers interested in becoming involved;
8. I learned that students who were enrolled in the project were more successful and enthusiastic about their learning;
9. I learned that these students appeared to be more likely to complete high school (although the project hadn't been running long enough to know this for sure);
10. I learned that there was a fantastic university and Ministry of Education partnership set up to support the project;
11. I learned that although lots of partnerships were formalized, the informal relationships were equally valued.

B. Challenges

1. A challenge in BC to having a similar project is to address the diversity of languages in BC;
2. A challenge is getting the Ministry of Education on side to support the project financially;
3. A challenge will be to get the first group of teachers to buy into the project. Once that happens, it will sell itself;
4. A challenge will be to ensure that all partners are committed for an extended period of time;
5. A challenge will be to ensure that the project is built around what parents and students view as needs for success;

C. What I would do differently

1. If I were to take another exchange trip to another place I would research the educational initiatives of the area first so I would have a basic understanding about the goals and directions for their educational system;
2. To do it over again, I would spend more time visiting fewer schools'
3. I would research the culture and history of the country before visiting so that I had a basic understanding of important historical events which enabled/disabled progress;

2. PLANS

Now that I have experienced an exchange I have put some thought to what kind of experience I would like the returning exchangees to experience.

- a. I have contacted groups who I'm involved with to ensure that there is an opportunity for them to visit. Some of these groups include the Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education Department; BC Principals' and Vice Principal's Association; First Nations Education Steering Committee, the BC College of Teachers and the BC Trustees and Superintendents' Association.
- b. I have asked my school superintendent and my trustees to make some time to meet with the exchangees;
- c. I will ensure that their schedule is flexible, yet ensure that they have opportunities to learn of the variety of Aboriginal Education initiatives locally and in BC;
- d. I will ensure that the Maori educators have opportunities to meet a diverse group of First Nations communities;
- e. I will ensure that there are frequent opportunities for the exchangees to contact their homes to help alleviate the culture shock and homesickness;
- f. I will ensure that the exchangees have an opportunity to be alone to reflect on what they are learning;

- g. I will give our guests an opportunity to form relationships with local First Nations people;

CONCLUSION

The Maori people were most welcoming. I was impressed by the commitment and professionalism the team had. The host home we stayed in was outstanding. I hope that I will be able to ensure that my exchange educators have equally as rich an experience as I.

I would like to thank the School Leadership Centre for this incredible opportunity.

D. DeRose