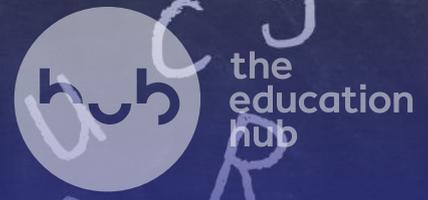# Burnside Primary School
Bright Spots Report

School: Burnside Primary, Christchurch

Bright Spots team members: Trudi Browne and Nic Rickard

Year levels: Year 0-6

Curricular area(s): All curriculum areas

Broad area of focus: Oracy Teaching and Learning

The specific focus of our project: To develop students' confidence and competence to communicate through a school-wide initiative to improve the teaching of oral language

Why this focus was important

Oracy pedagogy became a focus for the Year 0-2 team in our multicultural kura (school) in Christchurch as data collected at school entry indicated low levels of spoken language and language acquisition. 90% of ākonga (students) entering our school were unable to meet the school-entry (or age-level) expectations of naming body parts, completing a sentence using an opposite, using pronouns correctly and using compound sentences to describe a picture. Observations showed that ākonga at other levels in the school were not confident in expressing themselves orally in a range of contexts and genres. We felt that ākonga lacked the language structures to support communicating and collaborating at school and beyond, and believed that it was necessary to change the way we supported and developed their oral language confidence and ability. A high priority for us was supporting the oral language development of our Pasifika and Māori ākonga, who make up 28% of our school. The Year 0-2 team had already successfully implemented an oracy programme but we believed that it needed to be extended to all ākonga throughout the school. Shared language and expectations across the school, along with resource development for Years 3-6, needed to be a focus to increase understanding of the importance of oracy pedagogy for learners and their wellbeing.

Taking action

An Oracy Champions Group was formed with careful consideration to select people who were enthusiastic, encouraging and positive towards a change process focused on oracy across the school curriculum. We included at least one representative from each of the school's three teaching teams, along with the ESOL and Reading Recovery teachers. All team members were advocates for a focus on oracy, with some having been involved in the initial project in the Year 0-2 team.

The Oracy Champions group used the funding from The Education Hub to provide release time to meet together twice a term. This allowed time for developing understanding, collecting target student data, developing the poutama (expected levels of attainment) and resources, and then carrying out professional learning with teaching staff. The Oracy Champions ensured that all teaching team meetings included an element of oracy development. These meetings were also used to develop practice analysis conversations that focused on increasing student talk, reducing teacher questioning in order to increase reciprocal conversation with students, increasing wait time and extending students' vocabulary.

Teachers' roles in conversations with students were analysed by the teaching team and reflections were written up by individuals accordingly. Professional readings were discussed as part of teacher professional development and teaching team meetings in order to deepen teachers' knowledge[1].

During the first year of the two-year programme, an assessment poutama was developed to measure and track progress and growth in ākonga oracy, along with a range of resources to build school-wide protocols and consistent shared language around oracy. Teaching staff were given time to develop their own oracy understandings, to incorporate skills, common language and protocols in their teaching programmes, and to experiment with the poutama to support ākonga oral language development.

Target students who were broadly representative of the school community (ethnicity, academic level, language speaking backgrounds, age levels and learning spaces) were identified so that we had a basis for determining whether the initiative worked better for some groups than others. These students' data was tracked against the poutama and they were also interviewed to provide student voice to aid the direction of the project.

In the second year of the project, the focus moved from students (their baseline levels of oracy and areas needing development) to supporting and building kaiako (teacher) understanding. This involved the sharing of expertise through collaborative professional mentoring groups, led by our Oracy Champions, combined with goal setting and reflective practice. It was important that this mentoring was individualised, putting the onus on kaiako to make adaptations, and supporting and encouraging change for those who required a more direct approach.

Collaborative professional learning groups were the drivers for change in this project. Tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), ako (reciprocal teaching and learning) and whakawhanaungatanga (developing and strengthening relationships) were important principles from kaupapa Māori[2] that were incorporated into the mentoring process to support staff who were at different stages of the oracy journey – from those who had been involved since the inception, to those who were new to the kura, to those who were hesitant about the change. Kaiako were all positioned as learners taking responsibility for their own and others' learning and, by working within collaborative professional teams, participated in a kura-wide approach to curriculum implementation.

Engaging in new professional learning

The innovation was grounded in the 'why' of understanding the importance of oracy for students and the 'how' of implementing a programme of oracy development across the curriculum. School-wide expectations of the use of language and supporting resources were developed with staff so they felt they had ownership.

Construction and use of the poutama rubric gave staff and students a clear understanding of the next steps for each child's progress, as well as an understanding of the growth that they had already achieved. The poutama was also useful for goal setting and for ensuring that common language was used across the school. Staff were involved in developing the poutama, making adjustments, and trialling it with their students. One of the noticeable things that came out of this phase was that there were wildly varying understandings of language and phrases used in the poutama. This led to the development of a glossary which is now considered to be an integral part of the poutama.

Throughout the project, kaiako have built their understanding of the poutama and seen how they can use the oracy framework and resources not as a 'programme' but rather as an adaptable set of practices to be used flexibly across the curriculum to build the oral confidence and competence of tamariki as they move through the school.

the education hub

https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/

Mentoring in oracy pedagogy across the curriculum has made an impact in communication both for tamariki (children) and kaiako. Kaiako are now more aware of what to notice and what skills are important, and they continue to work actively towards improving this area for tamariki. They use specific, school-wide language that is associated with oracy pedagogy at an increased rate. They now also use oracy pedagogy across the day and across curriculum areas. This building of skills for both kaiako and tamariki is increasing the communication across teams, within staff meetings, between kaiako and tamariki, and among tamariki.

Checking impact

The initiative was initially targeted at the improvement of ākonga oracy skills, but shifted in the second year to a focus on kaiako pedagogical change. Information collected throughout the project focused on target students from a range backgrounds (see above) along with information collected from kaiako. As part of the work we did with the target students and across the school, we collected and recorded student voice regularly. As well as providing valuable formative data, sharing student voice data with the staff had a huge impact in encouraging, challenging and motivating us all.

Information gained from student voice shows:

- progress in discussions, eloquence, confidence, listening to and valuing others

- students stating that they are more confident, that oracy has helped them to find their voice, that they appreciate that they now have a voice and it is listened to by their peers and teachers

- students are aware of their next steps and are setting goals that they are actively working to achieve

Analysis of staff surveys and kaiako voice shows:

- factors that increased from the first collection point to the last include:
  - the use of oracy subject specific terminology
  - tangible connections integrating oracy across the curriculum
  - teachers' perception of oracy as a tool to enhance social and emotional connections with others

- mentoring appears to have played a positive role within our professional learning sessions. Many teachers mentioned that it has been a great motivator, heightening awareness and increasing engagement. It has also been instrumental in providing constructive and reciprocal feedback in a relaxed manner. Teachers have felt valued and supported to implement oracy and improve oracy practice.

- kaiako are noticing that ākonga have a voice that is valued, their opinions count, and they are confident to interact with a wider group of peers in a variety of different ways, settings and groupings.

Information gained from the assessment poutama shows:

- an increase in ākonga oracy skills across the strands

- greater consistency in interpretation as a result of staff involvement in moderating processes

Reflections and advice

The support from The Education Hub was invaluable as it enabled the project to move forward at a faster rate by providing time that enabled us to gain traction with the tumuaki (school principal/senior

leaders) and kaiako across the kura. It also gave us access to mentors who provoked and questioned the development of the initiative, which made for a better end product.

Having a group of Oracy Champions was a crucial element. This meant that there were a number of people driving and celebrating change. The Education Hub grant made this possible by funding the release of a significant number of people for between 1-2 days a term to work on the implementation of the framework, collect student voice, analyse the data in depth and reflect on next steps to ensure they were viable. This kind of work needs to be planned and budgeted for, and to have time allocated for it. Having a dedicated group of people planning for an effective, agile, and responsive change has made the difference. It has also allowed kaiako from throughout the school to have a voice and be involved in effecting change through their reflections, group discussions and what the mentors could see happening in rooms.

Next steps
We will continue to:

- embed oracy into our practice as part of what happens at this kura

- investigate the use of cultural narratives to support ākonga learning and confidence in the use of their oracy skills

- discuss with our Kahui Ako and the Ministry of Education about how to share this practice wider

- engage in discussions with a research provider to continue to test the impact of the work

Endnotes
1   One especially useful resource was Voice 21, a UK based charity focussed on transforming teaching and learning through talk.

2   Kaupapa Māori refers to principles and values that have been agreed upon as a foundation for action.

the education hub