

From Gwen Gilmore, your Independent Member in Cornwall, the United Kingdom.

An update

Three years ago I wrote about starting an Educational Doctorate with Exeter University. Essentially I traced a journey from a rich educational experience in rural South Canterbury, a degree at Canterbury University, a life as a dairy farmer in Geraldine, taking a year out and doing my teacher training when our children were starting school and finally a wonderful learning and teaching career at Mountainview High school in Timaru, South Canterbury. With colleagues, and the young people I taught with, I learnt the value of setting high standards having high expectations for all and doing things differently. During that time I also started my Masters of Educational Administration with Massey University graduating in 2002 and completed a Teaching English as a Second Language Diploma at Massey.

Workstuff

I left Mountainview, well-off in experience and understanding of professionalism and inclusion, that have travelled with me to the depths of Cornwall. Here, six years into an 'English' experience I have been fortunate to continue to lead the Partnership of schools improving standards of attainment, reducing exclusions and improving attendance. In case you wondered is it working? How well? Our three secondary schools have closed the gap on Cornwall averages from ¹ 13% in 2006 to 4% in 2008 for GCSE A* to C. This is equivalent to the Level One NCEA qualification and is a benchmark for 16 year old achievement in the UK. They have also reduced fixed term exclusions from above County averages in 2006 (66.9/1000 compared with a County average of 74.9/1000) reducing to well below in 2008 (2.6/100 compared with the County average of 5.7/100). The story about attendance is a similarly good news. There is similar progress all down through to the primary schools with achievement and attainment gaps being closed. Indeed, at KS1 (8 years of age) our writing was above County averages. So, in answer to the question how well? Quite well, with some aspects of really good and exemplary practice.

We still have areas to be developed. Community partnerships, new localities and multi-agency models of working will be on the agenda for the next two years. This will also involve increased attention to primary mental health services at the universal level. We are testing new systems level approaches for educational psychology. A focus at systems level gives school opportunities to examine new

¹ For those specifically interested in our educational improvement data it is available on a weblink [here](#)

ways to make progress on achievement for children and young people. It also supports our Inclusion strategy. We are unlikely to be able to achieve this change by ourselves so need the multi-agency teams and Community to support these developments.

So how has it been done? A mixture of additional government funding, support and challenge, in directly into the schools, increased emphasis on partnership working, multi-agency working and capacity building and research work. One particularly interesting project is a primary project to reduce fixed term exclusions. Called the 'Paul Hamlyn' project with the Head Teachers, and working on the principle that fixed term exclusions home are not always effective, if a pupil needs to have a fixed term exclusion they go to another school with a behaviour support worker. The staff member works on a roster system amongst a group of six schools with other schools in the partnership occasionally using the system. Whilst it is early days there have been some interesting outcomes for the pupils and the parents. For example, the pupils have developed a version of the information pamphlet for other children. It is available on the website or under this [link](#).

In summary, we will have another two years in which we will further refine and develop our school improvement work. Improving our work in engaging with our parents and developing some of our work further afield, for example our innovative Parents and Children Together (PACT), travels to Devon schools this year.

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Exeter stuff

A doctorate (EdD) route combines taught elements for two years with a final thesis of about 50,000 words for another two years. I was always rather interested in the assumptions around inclusion in England. The work I did with Special Education 2000 in New Zealand had probably influenced this to a large extent. However, I was also struck by the limits put on teachers and schools by the imposition of league tables and systems of performance management of teacher's and staff work. I am now in my third year and had a proposal to research inclusion and professionalism in one of our secondary schools accepted last July, 2008. This is going to be an international thesis as my first supervisor is Greek and second English. Needless to say, we have interesting discussions on my work and ideas.

In essence, I am researching an Inclusion room facility. The development of this provision has been part of my work with the schools partnership. Young people and teacher's perspectives are being investigated using a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory approach². This methodology looks at the rules, the power, the language and the community of those in the research. It is interpretive research that assumes that school change is embedded in its participant's histories and cultures.

² For those interested in this methodology Hedegaard's work *Learning in Classrooms: A cultural Historical Approach* (2001) is a good starting point.

I spent most of the Spring term (January 2009 to March 2009) completing the research interviews with the young people. During the Summer 2009 I will complete the research with the teachers.

So where is the travel?

In the last year my doctorate has travelled to Tunisia (last Easter), Germany, Slovakia and Poland, (last summer), Turkey (Christmas) and this Easter found itself in more sun than could be believed in Malaga! Working on the theory that small, frequent input will be more effective in the longer run it is interesting to reflect how this work based approach has really enabled me to develop new ways of working professionally. We meet my daughter Lucy and her husband Callum in Italy this year for a break.

I intend to graduate in January 2011. By then I expect to have taken in some more Eastern European bike trails, New Zealand this Christmas and who knows after that. It will have been a journey worth undertaking for the sheer variety, opportunities for meeting and working with interesting schools, staff and young people, and finding out more about other ways of learning.