

A TOOL TO GAUGE COLLABORATIVE

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THE WORD 'COLLABORATION' appears frequently and seems almost to be taken for granted in matters related to school leadership. It is nevertheless challenging work, easier in the saying than the doing. The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, it highlights a newly developed online survey tool to help ascertain the strength of espoused values for collaborative work within schools, or, if desired, across a cluster or kāhui ako. Secondly, it presents an opportunity to share the experiences of those who have already participated in a trial of the tool so that others can see its potential.

The article is structured in three parts. It begins with an explanation of how the four espoused Ariki values underpinning the survey tool originated. This is followed by a brief overview of the online survey tool and then a selective account of the insights gained from the trial showing the extent of teacher agreement on collaborative ways of working and how such information can be used to plan and prioritise next steps to further the collaborative intent of individual schools or those working as kāhui ako across schools.

Professional values for school development: The legacy of David Stewart

We are indebted to David Stewart (1933-2013) for his foresight in developing and naming four professional values for school development. David was an educationalist with experience as a teacher, primary school principal, academic, author and researcher. He had strong connections with NZEI and NZPF over many years. His work with New Zealand school principals focused on the development of their reflective capacities, a topic pertinent today. David initiated and developed the Te Ariki Project, a professional development programme for school principals. David was an early advocate of professional learning communities called quality learning circles (QLCs) because he believed leadership was intellectual work which was enhanced when practitioners gathered together to make collaborative sense of what worked and why. It was David, who, along with Tom Prebble, adapted the industry-based QLC approach for use in New Zealand schools. This approach provides protocols for principals working with teachers to explore and make meaning of their practice. It is an approach which has been used extensively in New Zealand schools for some years (Lovett, 2002, Lovett & Gilmore, 2003; Lovett & Verstappen, 2004). The ongoing relevance of David's work with the Ariki Project (drawing in regional directors) has been encapsulated in the Te Ariki Charitable Trust, of which NZPF and NZEI are trustees.

The four professional values which underpin the work of the Ariki Trust have gained in currency over time. They may even be more pertinent today given the Ministry of Education's

encouragement of school rebuilds and new builds which endorse a collaborative intent in teaching, learning, leadership and school designs. We believe the Ariki online survey tool, the focus of this article, has potential to highlight what it takes to create, maintain and develop unique and vibrant learning school communities through a closer interrogation of four key professional values.

The four professional values are 'Professional Discretion,' 'Collegial Obligation,' 'Reflective Inquiry and Discourse,' and 'Evidence-Based Professional Practice.' A commissioned literature review (Lovett, 2016) and Lovett (2018a) provide further information about each of these values drawing upon recent research studies which confirm the importance of such values for collaborative practice. An online survey tool was developed from that literature review and piloted in 2017 (Lovett, 2018b). An extended trial (later in 2018) was coupled with an analytical conversational strategy to explore how participating schools could work with the survey data to prioritise and plan action related to the survey values. 'Disciplined Dialogue' was the conversational technique introduced in the trial by Dr Lyn Bird (a Regional Director of the Te Ariki Trust) drawing upon the work of Swaffield and Dempster (2009). Dialogue was structured around three key questions, namely: 'What do we see in these data? Why are we seeing what we are? What, if anything, should we be doing about it?' (Dempster et al, 2017, p.44). The outcomes of the trial using the disciplined dialogue technique are featured in the third part of this article following a description of the survey tool.

The Ariki online survey tool

The survey tool contains items which help to unpack the meaning of the four Te Ariki professional values. The twenty-six items drawn from the commissioned literature review (Lovett, 2016) establish processes underpinning collective commitment to learning and development. These items provide a language for talking about what works and why under each of the four values. They also serve as a measure for schools to gauge the strength of how teachers and school leaders can work together to enhance student learning and achievement. Each of the items is answered by participants responding to a generic stem, 'To what extent does the staff of this school . . .' (eg realise that collegial sharing provides new insights into practice). The strength of agreement is recorded using one of four points on a Likert scale (ranging from to a great extent, to a moderate extent, to a slight extent and not at all). Schools then work with anonymized aggregated data in order to understand the levels and strength of agreement, identify and explain where and why results differ in their percentage spreads and decide on what, if any, actions are required. Details of the survey tool appear below:

LEARNING CULTURES

Te Arika Online survey tool: Professional values for school improvement

To what extent does the staff of this school . . . ?	1 To a great extent	2 To a moderate extent	3 To a slight extent	4 Not at all
1. Stick to the moral obligation to improve students' learning no matter the pressures				
2. Adopt a continuous improvement mindset for teaching practice				
3. Take opportunities to deepen professional practice through partnerships or networks within & beyond the school				
4. Create opportunities for teachers to lead				
5. Accept that those new to leadership work need to be supported				
6. Realise that collegial sharing provides new insights to practice				
7. Collect and act on data to inform next steps				
8. Establish trusting and constructive relationships				
9. Show willingness for mutual vulnerability in discussions about practice				
10. Value opportunities to question, interrogate and reshape practice with colleagues				
11. Blend considerations for colleagues alongside concern for task completion				
12. Fulfil assigned responsibilities so others see them as credible and trustworthy				
13. Trust one another's caring intentions and show commitment to others				
14. Take risks knowing support will be there				
15. Respect the integrity, honesty and commitment of colleagues				
16. Invite others to observe in one's classroom as learners				
17. Share best lessons with colleagues				
18. Know the types of questions which help to make sense of practice				
19. Make time for reading research & discussing insights with colleagues				
20. Co-construct meanings of practice with external facilitators				
21. Interpret & use data for improvement				
22. Discern what is important & what is irrelevant				
23. Show sensitivity to teachers' feelings & competence when interrogating student data in public				
24. Work with a data coach/team to build data literacy				
25. Develop mutual relationships where both parties increase knowledge, skills & thinking				
26. Construct new knowledge through collaborative work and social interactions				

The first value, *'Professional Discretion'* features items related to how a school keeps its focus on students and their learning despite other pressures.

The second value, *'Collegial Obligation'* emphasizes the importance of collective meanings of practice so that professional strength is gained from being part of a larger whole rather than leaving individuals to act alone.

The third value, *'Reflective Inquiry and Discourse'* recognizes the need for trusting relationships and opportunities to make sense of practice together.

The fourth and remaining value, *'Evidence-based Professional Practice'* is about having robust data sources to inform teaching and learning. This is more than merely collecting data but being able to use it to plan for improvement strategies.

Outcomes from the trial

Nine schools participated in the trial in 2018. For the purpose of this article, examples from one of those nine schools (pseudonym Tui School) are used to illustrate the kind of insights that may be gained by working with the survey data across the four Arika values using the disciplined dialogue technique. While each school was given a template to record answers to the three questions, what they recorded and the detail provided was their choice.

The first disciplined dialogue question, *'What do we see in these data?'* was an opportunity to interrogate and exhaust the data for as much descriptive detail as possible without jumping to explanations or conclusions. The second disciplined dialogue question, *'Why are we seeing what we are?'* enabled those with an understanding of the context to contribute their professional judgements for explaining the results. This brought multiple perspectives to the discussion. The remaining disciplined dialogue question, *'What if anything, should we*



be doing about this? linked discussions to the moral purpose of schooling motivating decisions about what to do or not to do as priorities were raised and discussed.

Tui School's discussion of the survey results was undertaken by the principal and two deputy principals. Their strategy for the first disciplined dialogue question was to take each item and place it in one of three categories on a chart to compose a visual representation. Category 1 included items which were clear strengths showing 70 per cent or higher responses 'to a great extent'. An example which contained all of the staff responses in those two categories was 'stick to the moral obligation to improve students' learning no matter the pressures'. It revealed 82 per cent and 18 per cent respectively in the highest ratings. A second category recognized items for which the result was considered satisfactory or in need of strengthening. One example was 'know the type of questions which help to make sense of practice' which showed 50 per cent of staff responding 'to a great extent', 45 per cent 'to a moderate extent' and 5 per cent 'to a slight extent'. The remaining category showed a spread across three or more ratings with higher percentages of 'to a moderate extent' or 'to a slight extent' or 'not at all'. An example was 'make time for reading research and discussing insights with colleagues' for which 18 per cent rated it 'to a great extent', 59 per cent 'to a moderate extent', 18 per cent 'to a slight extent' and 5 per cent 'not at all'.

When answering the second disciplined dialogue question, Tui School took the five items from Category three. These were 'co-construct meanings of practice with external facilitators', 'make time for reading research and discussing insights with colleagues', 'share best lessons with colleagues', 'invite others to observe in one's classroom as learners' and 'value opportunities to question, interrogate and reshape practice with colleagues'. They also noted 'weaving through these items was improving our understanding and use of evidence through 'work with a data coach/team to build data literacy'. In looking for reasons to explain these results, wider data literacy work was named and acknowledged as being in the early stages of change and development. Other questions were posed such as "Are the current systems we have, actually meeting the needs of our teachers? Where does the variance lie? Are they [the systems] being used in the way they have been designed? If not, why not? Do we need greater outcomes from teacher talk about students' learning?"

The third disciplined dialogue question then took those same five items and placed the Te Ariki values alongside the ERO Evaluation Indicators to examine alignment. This enabled the 'why' to be considered with the next step of 'how' and the setting of priorities for action. They decided their strategy was for the principal and deputies to meet with the junior, middle and senior hub leaders to build understandings of why these five items had puzzled them. They decided to work with the team leaders to:

- exhaust the data;
- examine current practices that are effective and affirm beliefs about what useful systems actually are;
- identify those systems that are being fulfilled as compliance requirements, rather than making a difference for learning outcomes; and
- clarify next steps.

In this way they were able to match the ERO domains of leadership for equity and excellence, professional capability and collective capacity, and evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building for improvement and innovation alongside the four Ariki values

of 'Professional Discretion,' 'Collegial Obligation,' 'Reflective Inquiry & Discourse' and 'Evidence-based Professional Practice.'

One specific example of how the discussion progressed is evident in the senior leadership team's mention of the school's use of teaching as inquiry (TAI). The team asked three basic questions:

- Is the current format for TAI growing our teachers?
- Are teachers linking research to best practice?
- Are teachers confident to work with data within the team to build data literacy?

Quality Learning Circles were then recognized as having the potential to improve four key aspects of professional learning and development. These were the need to:

- continue building relational trust and connections amongst staff;
- build confidence in a culture of critique and inquiry;
- continue developing a growth mindset and acknowledge one another's personal responsibilities; and
- change the 'default' position to 'what does our evidence suggest' when thinking and practice reverts to the 'status quo'.

Conclusion

Comments from principals using the Ariki Survey tool in disciplined dialogue conversations indicate clear support for its use. One said:

The findings ignited much discussion and acted as an anchor for the inclusion of other information sources. These connections assisted us to hone in and identify not only our areas for development but also those elements of within school culture that were to be celebrated. The strategy emerging from this work will inform future steps.

Another principal commented:

The Ariki Survey provided the opportunity for me to learn from the feedback from teachers through an anonymous survey. The disciplined dialogue process was useful in that it focused my thinking on the feedback as 'data' with the purpose of what the overall data was saying. I have always tended to hone in on feedback that sticks out the most, positive or negative. The disciplined dialogue process was useful to remind me to take caution before making assumptions, especially when considering what future actions to take.

The wording of the values and their corresponding items are useful for several reasons. Firstly, they provide a way of talking. It is useful to name aspects of each value so that they may become embedded in practice. Secondly, as each item is about an action, it is possible to explain the results in terms of current strengths and identify areas for ongoing development through the setting of priorities for future action. Thirdly, as a set, the items highlight the need for continual learning, reflection and responsiveness to context about the cooperative work needed to raise student learning and achievement. Fourthly, collegial relationships matter and are deepened through processes of questioning, interrogating, sharing, trusting and respecting the contributions of one another when each contributor is valued as a leader and learner simultaneously. As school development is collective rather than individual work, this online survey tool is timely because it draws attention to processes which are

important for collaborative learning cultures where a moral purpose of improvement in student learning is what drives professional work.

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