

A Ministry of Education, industry and community partnership strategy

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ABSTRACT

An education, industry and community partnership can provide an effective intervention for secondary school age students who are alienated from the education system and are exhibiting challenging, problematic behaviours. This article outlines a Ministry of Education/Special Education (MOE/SE), industry and community partnership that addresses the concerns of having students outside the school community during the school day. Case studies provide two examples of collaborative partnership in action.

KEYWORDS:

Secondary school pupils, integrated services, work experience, collaboration.

RATIONALE

The education, industry and community partnership strategy recognises that at Years 9 and 10, some individual students may benefit from an individualised programme of study that takes them outside the formal classroom – this may include a practical work experience in an industry of interest or attendance at a “hands-on” course offered by an outside provider. It also recognises that success in New Zealand’s secondary school system is not possible for all students given that there are students who do not relate well to the learning styles offered by some teachers. The compulsory and elective curriculum offered has little interest for some students (Wirth, 1983). Some students have been adversely affected by past school experiences (Hyman, Kay, Mahon, Cohen, Weber, Siegel, 2003; Hyman, Cohen, Mahon, Tabori, 2004), and some students have entered the school system burdened by outside-school experiences and on the trajectory towards youth offending (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002; Cormack & Carr, 2000; Frick, 1998; Loeber & Farrington, 1998 and 2000; Nagin & Tremblay, 2004; Patterson & Yoerger, 2002).

The education, industry and community partnerships strategy incorporates a practical hands-on learning experience for a student that directly involves the deliberate collaboration between five parties: a student, their school, the student’s family, a community sponsor, and a business or industry provider. The liaison role is met by the education lead worker. The term industry is used to cover business, commerce, agriculture and services, and includes employers, the self-employed (McQueen, 1992), and voluntary organisations in the public and private sectors, including iwi organisations such as Rūnanga, (MOE, 1993; ERO, 1996).

The partnership activity usually occurs during the school day, but may overlap into out-of-school hours. It differs from work experience in that students receive some remuneration for their labour, and someone other than the industry supplying the work provides this monetary incentive.

THE ROLE OF EACH PARTICIPANT

The student is required to be punctual, motivated, willing to learn, honest and reliable; to reflect the characteristics of a good employee, to behave appropriately and to show respect to the industry and all the people working there. The student is also required to attend school as stated in the contract drawn up by the education lead worker.

A crucial component of the education lead worker role is to:

- match the workplace with the student’s interest (ask the students, their family and Teacher what their interests are)
- get the caregivers written permission to share information about the child with industry provider and community sponsor
- go to the yellow pages of the phone book to find local providers
- make appointments to meet with the manager of local providers to discuss the child and seek assistance
- follow-up discussions with letters outlining details discussed and agreed on
- put in place the appropriate structures to ensure success of the partnership, including identifying the possible risks to the student and the industry, and putting in appropriate strategies to address these
- liaise between all parties
- monitor the progress of the student in the workplace and at school
- assess and report on the outcome of the partnership to all parties.

The school’s role is to allow flexibility with the student’s timetable, and encourage the student to succeed. A suitable staff member should provide motivational support. The student has to be allowed to leave the school grounds at appropriate times. The school will report back to education lead worker on changes in the student’s behaviour.

The family support the partnership by encouraging the student to attend school and the workplace as outlined in an agreement, and ensure the child has the appropriate dress and care including health and clothing issues. They need to communicate with the education lead worker on any changes in the student's behaviour and any concerns that might affect the success of the partnership.

The community sponsor provides an agreed amount of money based on a minimal amount per hour over a set period of time as an extrinsic incentive for the student to attend the workplace.

The industry provider provides a positive, practical and safe work experience appropriate to the student's level of ability and interest as discussed with the education lead-worker.

CONCERNS

One of the major concerns around a student involvement in an education industry and community partnership during the school day is that it is time consuming and may result in a lesser chance of succeeding in examinations or gaining qualifications. This strategy is most suitable for those students who are already failing in the existing school system and have little chance of achieving academic success. Through involvement in the partnership, the young person has an opportunity to gain in a variety of ways including increasing their motivation to attend school (Russell, 1997), and the development of improved problem-solving, personal development and communication competencies (Rees & Rees, 1992). Schools, industry and community sectors also gain: "Through collaboration, each sector learns from the other as they acquire an understanding of each other's goals and cultures," (Sutherland, 1997, p 36). To address other concerns raised by schools, it was pointed out that under S 25b of the Education Act (1989), a Principal can exempt a student from attending classes to participate in a work experience programme.

One of industry's concerns was the legality of having a student on their premises. Representatives from the New Zealand Department of Labour, Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) and the MOE assured me that the provision of a monetary incentive is not affected by the minimum wage regulations due to the students being under the age of 16. The OSH Handbook (S 2.17) states that "while no employer shall employ any person under the age of 15 in a place where goods are being manufactured for trade or sale ... persons under the age of 15 may visit factory workplaces if under the direct supervision of an adult". The industry provider is not providing remuneration, this comes from the sponsor, so the student is not considered to be employed by them.

Another concern from industry was the student being disruptive and a hindrance to productivity. Through the case studies outlined below, we found that the benefits of the student's presence outweighed any perceived disadvantages, which was consistent with research-based evidence. Industry gained through the enhancement of their

profile and relationships with the local community and through the increase in staff morale who worked with the students (Millett, 1997).

Both OSH and the MOE recommend that in the contract created for the partnership, industry must identify any risks to the student in their workplace and put in place appropriate strategies to keep the student safe. A policy of identifying risks to the workplace through the student's behaviour and presence was also applied. Strategies were then introduced to overcome this.

CASE STUDY ONE

A partnership strategy was developed to address the needs of a year 10 boy I will call 'Adam'. Ever the entrepreneur, Adam would find bits and pieces and sell them through local magazines. People said they found it difficult to warm to Adam because of his aggressive demeanour, repetitive lying, and habit of picking the sores on his face and arms and touching people with the remnants of bloody scabs. He would rarely look at people, his head was always down and he constantly muttered obscenities at anyone who got too near to him. Adam looked like a clown, with his bright pink hair, size 11 sneakers (he took a size 8) and his pants not only far too big for him, but tied with a piece of string and the trouser legs slit down the side and dragging behind him. Adam flaunted the rules: he would choose to exit himself from a classroom midway through lessons but the teacher or his peers never confronted him because he was too explosive. Adam was finally referred to Group Special Education (GSE) because his aggression was escalating in the school environment and because he was now absent from school more than he was attending. The truanting was less of a problem than his attendance.

Adam's strength was his interest in "finding" bits and pieces off teachers' desks, kids' bags, the rubbish bins and gifts from "an old lady that lives down the street". This boy clearly had an entrepreneurial spirit, albeit, slightly suspect. As far as I could ascertain, this was his only interest, so we built upon that. Adam received individual lessons on setting up and running his own business. The GSE lead worker convinced a local auctioneer to employ Adam two afternoons a week for 2.5 hours each day. He signed out of school at midway through lunch time, giving him time to eat lunch and allowing for travel time (a second community sponsor provided a second-hand bike, helmet and lock), and he would clock in at an agreed time and sign out when he completed his 2.5 hours. One office worker enjoyed taking responsibility for this process. She ensured he received a drink when he arrived – and he quickly bonded with her. Adam proved to be a keen, energetic worker and the workers in the warehouse where he was stationed took him under their wing. While he was only ever paid \$10 for his 5 hours a week of scheduled work, Adam put in extra hours and also began to help out during the auction process in the evenings. With the encouragement of his work mates, Adam began to communicate more, he would take books and his homework to work and his truanting almost ceased.

Although his aggressive behaviours never appeared in the months he worked at the auctioneers, Adam was eventually excluded from his school because of an explosive incident where he shattered windows and smashed a computer. This suited Adam as he was able to devote more time to his newly developed business of “acquiring”, purchasing and trading used goods.

CASE STUDY TWO

Alienated from the mainstream education system, exhibiting serious and concerning behaviour in and out of school, this 15 year-old boy I will call Stace was known to the police and was at risk of being excluded from his college. Stace, is an intelligent young man who aspires one day to attend university. Stace identified a private boarding school that had notable success over recent years with difficult young men and their NCEA results. Regrettably, their fees were an obstacle for many families. Recognising that Stace was on a trajectory to youth offending and the need for immediate intervention, an Education-Industry-Community Partnership was formed:

The family contributed to a \$120 deposit on the school fees and supported Stace in his desire to go to his school of choice. MOE/GSE acted in the role of liaison with family, school, industry and community, and approved a boarding bursary for at-risk youth. Following an interview, the school agreed to take Stace into their Year 11 class and supported the transition. Local police covered a large chunk of the fees (\$2,500), and a community organisation gave a donation to cover stationery, books and other curriculum expenses. A local horticulturalist employed Stace part-time in the last term at his local school and full-time over the school holidays. This kept Stace occupied and out of trouble during an at-risk time and enabled him to buy his own uniform, pay the activity fees and put money in a tuck-shop account for the year. It also provided him with an outstanding mentor, a man he looked up to and who appreciated his work ethic. Along with his bank balance, Stace’s self-esteem and confidence grew.

Although without incident, Stace has since completed his Year 11 and gained a number of NCEA credits.

CONCLUSION

By working collaboratively, education, industry and community personnel can provide a positive experience for secondary school students who are alienated from the education system. While the partnership requires participating students to be out of school for part of the school day, in both cases outlined in this article it had the beneficial outcome of both boys being reconnected to learning. The education-industry-community partnership provided the meaning for why they were attending school.

APPENDICES

A: Time Card

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PROFILE OF AUTHOR

Alison Sutherland's professional background includes being a commerce head of department, secondment to the New Zealand stock exchange to implement the NZSE stock market challenge and Principal of Epuni Youth Justice School for young, violent offenders. She completed a Masters in Education in 1997 with a thesis on education and industry partnerships. She is now working on her PhD focusing on young offenders' perceptions of their school experiences, and the assessment and interventions for students on a trajectory toward criminal offending.

APPENDIX A

***[Student's Name]* Time Card**

2.5 hours on Wednesdays and Thursdays (eg. 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm)

Days of Work	Report in Time	Signed	Leaving Time	Signed
Wednesday, 17th April				
Thursday, 18th April				
Wednesday, 24th April				
Thursday, 25th April	ANZAC DAY			
Wednesday, 1st May				
Thursday, 2nd May				
Wednesday, 8th May				
Thursday, 9th May				
Wednesday, 15th May				
Thursday, 16th May				
Wednesday, 22nd May				
Thursday, 23rd May				
Wednesday, 29th May				
Thursday, 30th May				
Wednesday, 5th June				
Thursday, 6th June				
Wednesday, 12th June				
Thursday, 13th June				
Wednesday, 19th June				
Thursday, 20th June				
Wednesday, 26th June				
Thursday, 27th June				

No. hours worked Total \$ Signed as Received: