



Student Led Conferences at Parua Bay School.

“For the focus to be kept on the learning, and the ownership of learning with the child, then the best person to talk about the learning is the learner.” Michael Absalom, Clarity in the Classroom (2006).

At Parua Bay School, teachers, students and their parents form an invaluable partnership in the learning journey. We expect our students to develop a greater understanding of their ability to control their own learning and to have a voice in the learning process. Our teachers and students use the language of learning in the classroom.

For example:

- Learning Purpose: “Why are we learning this – is there a genuine reason?”
- Learning Intentions: “We are learning to ...”
- Success Criteria: “How will we know we have learnt this...?”

A student-led conference (SLC) is a conversation between the parent, the teacher and the student, focused on recent learning. While the teacher sets up the conference, the student leads it. Student-led conferences are widely used in New Zealand schools, and have been proven to enable rich communication between all parties, and most importantly, strong motivation for the learner. The conferences provide opportunities for parents to support their child in their learning both actively and meaningfully, to help them set and achieve their numeracy, literacy and personal goals, and to be aware of how much responsibility their child is taking for their own learning. Your child will be involved in preparation work with their teacher to enable them to conduct their student-led conference with confidence. Parent support for the conference, as a serious conversation about learning, is vital to its success.

We believe our students should be listened to intently and supported appropriately towards becoming autonomous individuals, confident to use their own ‘voice’ to discuss their

personal learning journey with parents and teachers. In her research about student-led conferences as an alternative reporting method, Taylor Patel (2009) notes that,

“In reporting, there is a need to consider how to create ‘student voice’ because students, as learners, know the most about their learning. Effective reporting systems will be ones where ‘student voice’ is an integral part of the reporting process.”

Professor John Hattie’s book, “Visible Learning, Tomorrow’s Schools and the Mindsets that make the difference in Education, (2009)” is a ‘revised list of the most effective influences on student achievement’, in which he identifies student self-reporting as the most significant indicator linked to raised student achievement.

Students’ learning is one of the greatest investigations they are involved in at school. It is critical that the learning process has a student voice and that it is heard and valued by parents, teachers and peers alike. Student-led conferences provide a powerful forum for students to communicate their learning goals and achievements. They give our students a voice. SLCs were introduced in 2015 and have replaced the more traditional parent-teacher conference, with which many parents may be more familiar. We fully understand that there are times when parents have concerns about their child that they wish to speak to their teacher without the student being present. It is not our intention to replace parent-teacher dialogue with student-led conferences, and it is important that you contact your child’s teacher with any concerns when they arise, and likewise, your child’s form teacher will contact you if they have any concerns. If you do require time with your child’s teacher aside from the Student Led Conference, this can easily be arranged. However, this would be in addition to the usual Student Led Conference programme, as the educational value your child derives from participating in their own student-led conference cannot be compromised.

Highly respected educator, Professor Guy Claxton is very focused on helping children to be the best learners possible, and supports the notion of ‘Building Learning Power’. Claxton has documented the process of cultivating good learners, and the profile of what a good learner looks like. His research stresses that:

“Good learners are self-aware, interested in contemplating their own habits, strengths and weaknesses as they go about learning, and able to think strategically about how they can become even stronger and well-rounded in their approach. They have a rich vocabulary for talking about the process of learning – for example, when and how they learn different kinds of things best – and also about themselves as developing learners.”

In “Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind: How Intelligence Increases When You Think Less, (2000)” Claxton talks of the ‘learning curriculum’ and the need for educators:

“To be committed to the strengthening of resilience, and this requires conveying to young people an accurate view of the many faces of learning, of the mind and of themselves... as one learns, so one can also be learning how to learn; becoming a better learner.”

In Horizons and Whirlpools: The well travelled pathway of national standards, (2009), Hattie notes that,

“If students are to be successful in their learning, in their self-regulation of their learning, and in their own interpretations of assessments, it is optimal that they are involved in this communication to their parents of their achievement and progress.”

Claxton’s approaches connect with Hattie’s recent research that indicates the crucial role in children’s learning of the quality of the teacher and the feedback children receive from the teacher. Our student-led conferences are based upon high quality teacher feedback, which provides children with rich learning opportunities. Parent support for this well-researched, evidence-based approach is essential and we do expect this support. In conclusion, the purpose of the student-led conference is for the student to discuss their goals, progress and achievement with their parents and teacher. Social or behavioural issues are addressed as they arise during the year; parents and teachers simply need to contact one another to discuss the matter causing concern.

Parua Bay School