Premier’s Masterton Homes Special Education Scholarship

Positive Behaviour for Learning: Innovative and Sustainable Models in Early Childhood Settings

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My study tour examined models of best practice of positive behaviour for learning (PBL) in early childhood settings within the United States by analysing data, systems and practices at technical assistance centres and exemplary implementation sites and attending international conferences. This provided insights into how PBL could be used in NSW public schools to support and prepare students starting school to meet the increased expectations for social and academic skills required for success. My study tour spanned five states in the United States, including California, Iowa, Missouri, Oregon and Florida. The states were selected based on scheduled conferences and identification of those states as locations with exemplary systems, practices and data pertaining to implementing PBL in early childhood settings.

PBL is a priority of Public Schools NSW and is closely aligned to initiatives including the Wellbeing Framework for Schools, Every Student, Every School, and the Schools Excellence Framework*.* Given that more than half of NSW public schools implement PBL and the strong connections of PBL to the Early Years Learning Framework and the general capabilities within the national curriculum, this study was timely to support the successful implementation of those initiatives.

PBL in preschools is aligned to the Early Years Learning Framework and supports the guidelines of the National Quality Standard to address key features of preschool learning environments. When PBL extends to within the preschool, the whole school representative PBL team work together to develop a shared knowledge and understanding of PBL and provide continued support for children from preschool through to primary school. This implementation also functions as a supportive structure to assist preschoolers transitioning into primary school.

According to the NSW PBL [website](http://www.pbl.schools.nsw.edu.au), outcomes of PBL in early childhood settings are concerned with three key areas, namely:

* 1. supporting children to have positive social behaviour experiences
  2. supporting staff capacity and knowledge about behaviour guidance
  3. building connections between the school and preschool to enhance supportive, positive learning environments.

California

The 13th Annual Association for Positive Behavior and Supports is an annual international conference that promotes research-based strategies to decrease problem behaviours. The conference features more than 150 conference items with a specific early childhood and positive behaviour supports strand. During the conference I attended all conference items pertaining to the early childhood strand. I also presented an item at the International Speaker’s Ignite Session outlining my study tour and inviting networking opportunities. This led to connections being formed and invitations from researchers and practitioners to sites within states I was visiting. I also attended an early childhood networking group at the conference which lead to further collaborative networking opportunities.

Some key sessions I attended at the APBS conference included:

* + Getting Preschool Classrooms on Board with SW-PBIS (school wide- positive behaviour interventions and supports) – This presentation supported participants to learn strategies to ensure school-wide effort included all staff and children. The presenters shared resources to support staff buy-in, training, and data decision-making.
  + Achieving Implementation Fidelity: Coaching Early Education Professionals and Parents to Use PBIS (Positive Behaviour Intervention and Supports) – This workshop presented the results of three studies that examined coaching strategies to support early education professionals and parents to use PBIS strategies. Presenters used videos and scenarios to guide reflection on implementation fidelity.
  + Applying ABA Principles in Natural Environments: Evidence-based Early Intervention Teaching Practices – This session demonstrated the use of applied behaviour analysis principles in natural environments. The focus was on teaching new skills and reducing interfering behaviour in young children, while focusing on compassionate, constructive, and educationally oriented strategies.
  + From Birth to Graduation: Implementing a Seamless System of PBIS – This presentation discussed how PBIS was not an approach restricted to schools. Instead, PBIS could be used in early intervention and education programs to prevent challenging behaviour and promote social competence. The focus of the presentation was on learning about PBIS as a seamless system that can be used successfully in early childhood, primary and secondary education settings.

The result of attending the conference was that I developed a toolkit of knowledge, skills and deep understandings of current research underpinning PBL in early childhood settings to support successful implementation.

Iowa

The state’s early childhood positive behaviour, intervention and supports team is currently based at Drake University. My study tour was an opportunity to meet with an instructional coach at the university who is one of the state leaders of PBL in early childhood settings. She shared and built my capacity to lead a number of foundational early professional learning packages developed in Iowa. This included the ePyramid model, in which a professional learning package is designed specifically to support early childhood staff with the implementation of PBL in early childhood settings. The package is evidence based and is set up to be used as a model for self-paced, flexible delivery. The package included several modules:

* + Module 1: Building Relationships and Creating Supportive Environments
  + Module 2: Promoting Social Emotional Competence – Social Emotional Teaching Strategies
  + Module 3a: Individualised Intensive Interventions – Developing an Understanding of Challenging Behaviour
  + Module 3b: Individualised Intensive Interventions – Developing a Behaviour Support Plan
  + Module 4: Leadership Strategies for Supporting Children’s Social and Emotional Development and Addressing Challenging Behaviour

This package is very comprehensive. I am working towards contextualising and registering the package as a specific professional learning package framed on the Early Years Learning Framework.

Missouri

During my visit to Missouri I was fortunate to meet the Missouri State Positive Behaviour Intervention and Supports team and take part in the quarterly State Leadership Team Meeting. The meeting was extremely valuable. A number of key highlights of my visit to Missouri included:

* + I acquired an electronic version of the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET), a fidelity tool to identify strengths and areas of improvement in PBL implementation in all settings. This has been adapted and used within Australia so that portions of the SET can be implemented in a more sophisticated and efficient manner.
  + I participated in a working party meeting of the Summer Training Institute to plan for an intensive summer differentiated professional learning event. This meeting proved very useful for the structure of professional learning planning events in Australia.
  + I visited a number of exemplary early childhood centres across Missouri. During these visits I interviewed staff to gain insights into effective systems and practices as well as data collection methods to enhance the success of PBL implementation. I toured the early childhood centres, paying particular attention to environmental supports including the classroom physical environment, signage and routines.
  + I travelled to Kirksville with the State Leadership Team to facilitate the Program Wide Positive Behaviour Support Early Childhood Summit at Kirksville Early Childhood Early Learning Center. This involved networking with staff from other early childhood services implementing PBL, networking and sharing of ideas regarding issues specific to the implementation of positive behavior support at the early childhood/preschool level. My visit also involved touring a Gold Level Recognition Early Childhood Center and meeting with staff from other early childhood services within the state currently implementing PBL.

Oregon

During my visit to Oregon I was fortunate to have an itinerary organised by a state leader of PBL in early childhood settings.

A number of key highlights of my visit to Oregon included:

* + participating in a local coach meeting –a monthly meeting structured to provide support to PBL coaches in early childhood settings. Reflective discussions with participants at these meetings has resulted in an adaptation of the format being used as the basis for coach meetings across multiple principal networks
  + meeting with state and regional PBL in early childhood Coordinators – Structured discussions to learn about the best ways to manage a consistent approach to state-wide implementation including the provision of staff professional learning and strategies for fidelity data collection
  + site leadership team meeting – provided fundamental understandings of the stakeholders required to ensure meeting productivity. The structure, format, duration and frequency of the meetings were useful as guides for meeting advice for early childhood centres in Australia
  + visiting a number of diverse exemplary early childhood centres across Oregon that implement PBL, including:
    - Head Start programs – preschools for children and families with lower incomes that have been implementing PBL for many years. Hearing from the benefit of their experience and reflection on their implementation assisted in providing guidance to early childhood centres in Australia
    - a number of suburban centres with variations in demographics including socio economic backgrounds of clientele, diversity in cultural and linguistic backgrounds and educational philosophies of the centres

Florida

I attended the 13th Annual National Training Institute on Effective Behaviour Practices: Addressing Challenging Behaviour. Being there provided the opportunity to attend multiple, in-depth hands-on practical workshops to support proactive and preventative social and emotional learning by young children. The conference presenters were internationally and nationally recognised researchers and program developers. The conference was based on the pyramid model, which is a conceptual framework for PBL that has been modified specifically for early childhood settings.

Key presentations I attended at the 13th National Training Institute were:

* + Peeking into the Pyramid Model – This session was an introduction to the pyramid model. The presentation included a highlight of key web-based resources to support the implementation of a positive behaviour model in early childhood settings, in particular those from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children.
  + Research on Pyramid Model Practices: Findings, Issues and Implications – The focus of this session was to disseminate recent findings on the pyramid model in regard to coaching staff to implement the model with fidelity.
  + Using Visual Schedules to Facilitate Transitions and Promote Engagement – This practical session provided a toolkit of practical skills to support the development of visual schedules to promote child engagement and support independent transition in the early childhood classroom. Examples could be modified to suit a range of educational settings.

Dissemination

As a result of my Masterton Homes Premier’s Special Education Scholarship, positive behaviour for learning practices have been greatly enhanced across NSW through diverse dissemination opportunities I have initiated and collaborated in. These include the following key initiatives.

*Social Media: Twitter*

The Twitter account was created primarily as a dissemination tool during my study tour. I have close to 1000 followers and continues to regularly posts tweets about PBL to highlight exemplary practices and support data collection to drive implementation with fidelity.

*Collaboration with NSW Public Schools Preschool – Year 2 Initiatives Officers*

I initiated collaborative projects with the Ultimo P-2 Initiatives Officers to strengthen the delivery of learning in early childhood settings. This collaboration has resulted in:

* + two-termly preschool professional learning events embedded into the PBL professional development calendar specifically to support NSW Public School preschools across the Ultimo Operational Directorate to implement PBL with fidelity. Preliminary discussions indicate that this will possibly be extending to the Macquarie Park Operational Directorate.
  + an annual #ECTeachMeet event where early childhood teams will host and showcase early childhood best practice
  + developing a film pond (class movie) video highlighting essential features of PBL implementation and linking those to best practice in early childhood settings to promote evidenced-based practices that support child outcomes. Once finalised, this will be a web-based resource accessible to all
  + serving as a steering committee member of the Quality Learning for Everyone: Early Years Conference alongside other Educational Services staff. The team included an Aboriginal education and wellbeing advisor, P-2 initiatives officers and an assistant principal learning and support. MyPL data indicates participants drew from across three operational directorates. Participants included educational services staff, school executive, early childhood and early intervention teaching staff and school learning support officers. This event resulted in the development of inclusive teaching materials to support teaching behaviour expectations to Aboriginal children, inclusion of two workshops framed on PBL to support teaching early childhood children expected behaviours and planning for further collaborations.

*Collaboration between PBL state team and other operational directorates*

This collaboration is to support the initiation of PBL in departmental early childhood settings across the state. As a result this process has already started in the Wagga Wagga Operational Directorate and has strengthened in the Macquarie Park Operational Directorate.

*Conference presentations and workshops based on study tour findings*

* + Early Learning Conference Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Future – Cairns, #PBLec: Using an Evidenced Based Approach to Support the Wellbeing of Young Children (August 2016), Yasmin Ibrahim
  + Quality Learning for Everyone: Early Years Conference, What’s your Story? Using Narrative to Guide Expected Behaviours and Support Wellbeing (July 2016), Yasmin Ibrahim and Carla De Angelis
  + Successful Learning Conference, 2016, Increasing Staff Capacity through Effective Coaching Practices Using PBL as a Case Study (June 2016), Yasmin Ibrahim and Carla De Angelis
  + Successful Learning Conference, 2016, Positive Behaviour for Learning: Supporting young children connect, succeed and thrive, Yasmin Ibrahim
  + NSW Public Schools Rural and Remote Conference, 2016, #PBLec: Using an evidenced based approach to support the wellbeing of young children, Yasmin Ibrahim
  + APBS, 2016 – San Francisco, Making Global Connections – Developing Models of PBS within Australian Early Childhood Settings, Yasmin Ibrahim
  + Upcoming Conferences with Successful Proposal Submission
  + APBS 2017 – Denver, What’s your Story? Using Narrative to Guide Expected Behaviours and Support Wellbeing, Carla De Angelis and Yasmin Ibrahim

Participation in these conferences has lead to dissemination locally, state-wide, nationally and internationally across all education sectors.

Conclusion

The New South Wales Premier’s Special Education Scholarship has provided a unique opportunity for me to view a range of technical assistance centers, early childhood settings and attend two international conferences that provided research and support for young with children challenging behaviour. My visit also presented an opportunity to network with many experts in the field of PBL in early childhood settings. These connections have continued to develop beyond the Premier’s Teaching Study Tour.