

CHARACTER EDUCATION AT TAUPO-NUI-A-TIA COLLEGE

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23 December 2009

Executive Summary

The effect of incorporating character education in schools was first demonstrated in 2004 when a questionnaire was sent to New Zealand institutions. A similar questionnaire was re-sent to the schools in 2007 as a follow-up study, and from a combined response rate of 85%, the results suggested that the presence of character education has indeed enhanced a number of overall qualities within each school.

One institution in particular, Taupo-nui-a-Tia College, a co-educational secondary school catering for students from Year 9 to Year 13, found character education to be such a success that it was adopted as part of its curriculum. This report aims to summarise the effect of character education in this school using a longitudinal approach (2004 2007 and 2009) by addressing the following questions:

- What has increased over time?
- What cumulative changes have emerged over time?
- What has decreased over time?
- What has remained consistent through time?

The key dimensions which have demonstrated a continued improvement as a result of the presence of character education are in regard to relationships between staff and students, and relationships between students. Continued improvements have also been exhibited in relation to student playground behaviour, discipline within the school, the school being perceived as a caring community, staff stability, enrolments and ERO reports.

Section A: Background Information

Since the initiation of character education in 2004, the number of staff and students has grown over a time-span of 5 years, as can be seen in Figure 1.

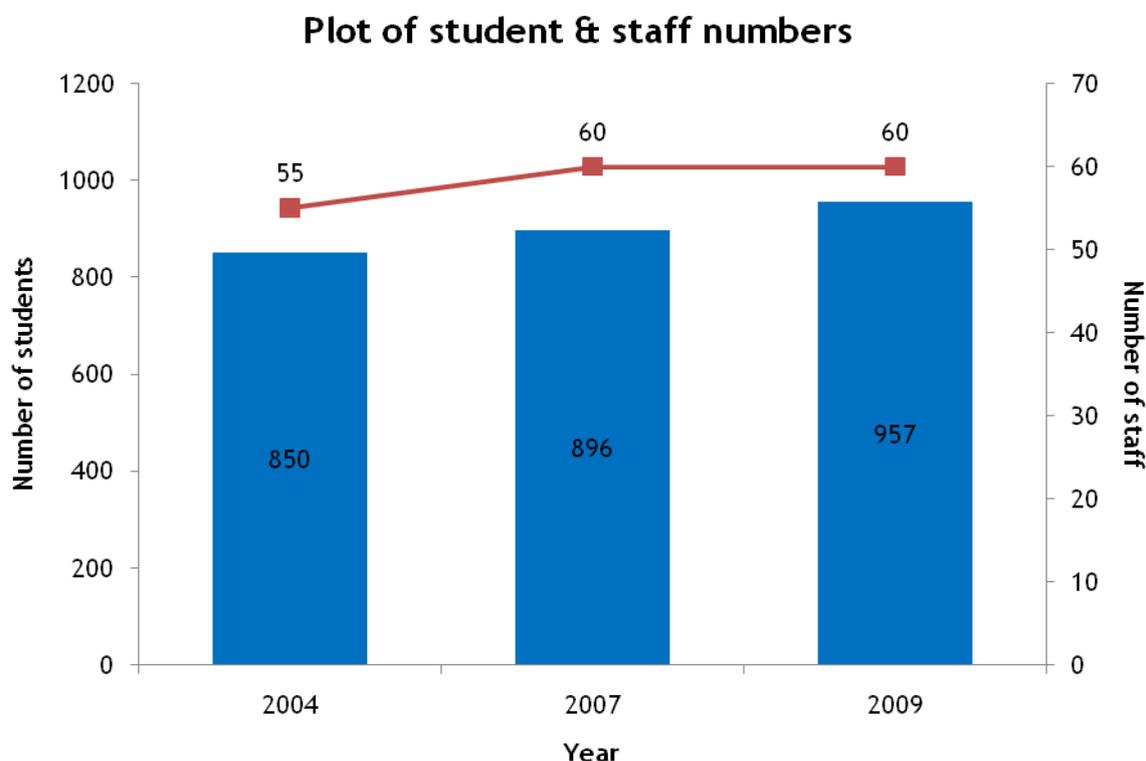


Figure 1: Student & staff numbers

A decile classification is an indication of socio-economic (SES) deprivation and ranges from 1 being “high deprivation, low SES communities” to 10 being “low deprivation, high SES communities”. When this analysis was initially conducted in 2004, Taupo-nui-a-Tia College had a decile rating of 4, which by 2009 had increased to 6, thereby suggesting that the College is moving into a state of lower deprivation.

It should be noted that in 2004, there was a need for the College to record “hard data on incidents of unacceptable behaviour” as one approach to measuring the impact of character education training. This, however, appears to have been abolished within the subsequent time periods.

Section B: Effects of Character Education

Method

For the purpose of analysing a score sheet (Table 1) has been created which summarises the College’s overall perception of the effects of character education (1 = a positive effect/improvement; 0 = no improvement/about the same).

As described in prior analyses, the score sheet is a method of condensing multiple response categories (improved, about the same, no improvement) into a bivariate response (improved versus same/no improvement). The use of this score sheet in a longitudinal sense provides a visual representation as to whether character education has, in fact, been effective in each of these sub-categories.

To support the findings that character education has enhanced the overall qualities within Taupo-nui-a-Tia College, a number of qualitative questions allowed the deputy principal (2004 & 2007) and the principal (2009) to describe how integrating character education into the curriculum has indeed impacted on the College. The following paragraph describes categories which have shown a notable change over time.

Table 1: Score sheet

	Initial Analysis (2004)	Secondary Analysis (2007)	Third Analysis (2009)
E. Relationships			
• Between principal & staff	0	0	1
• Between staff & students	1	1	1
• Between students	1	1	1
• Between school & parents	1	1	0
F. Student behaviour			
• Overall student behaviour	0	1	1
• Playground behaviour	1	1	1
G. Discipline			
• Within the school	1	1	1
• Influence on school	0	1	1
• Effect on stand-downs	n/a	1	1
H: Vandalism	0	1	1
I: Student attendance	0	1	1
J: The school as a caring community	1	1	1
K: Staff stability			
• Impact	1	1	1
• Reduction in staff turnover	1	1	1
• Improving staff morale	1	1	1
• Retaining good staff	1	1	1
L: Enrolments	1	1	1
M: ERO reports	1	1	1

N: Use of specialist services	0	0	0
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Findings

The two key dimensions which have shown continued improvement as a result of the presence of character education are in relationships between staff and students, and relationships between students. It was observed that the improved relationship between staff and students could be attributed to the fact that “senior students understand how we do things around here”, and the improvement in the relationships between students could be attributed to “different year levels mix[ing]”.

A continued improvement has also been exhibited in relation to student playground behaviour and the need for discipline within the school, with the reflection that “our issues with senior students have dropped quite dramatically. Most of the behavioural problems occur at Year 9 in Term 1 or from new/transition students”. A key to maintaining this improvement in discipline is contained in the following comments, “the student’s story is heard and the students are treated differently”, and “the decision-making process is based around our values”. The school is perceived as a caring community which has been reflected in ERO reports in which “they commented on the positive atmosphere in the school and the supportive environment”.

Staff stability is the dimension which has achieved the most consistent improvements, particularly in the areas of staff impact, reduction in turnover, improved morale and retention of good staff. Maintaining staff stability has been attributed to the College’s positive atmosphere achieved as a result of character education being undertaken in the school.

In regard to enrolments, Taupo-nui-a-Tia College has three times the number of Year 9 enrolments compared to their neighbouring school. Character education is clearly a point of difference between the two institutions. Based on a simple linear regression model (Figure 2), and provided that all constraints are held constant, we can forecast that student and staff numbers at Taupo-nui-a-Tia College will increase. The R2 value is a statistical measure of how well a regression line approximates real data points, and since the R2 values for student & staff numbers is close to 1, there is evidence that this model can predict a trend in the data. This is, however, a very rough guide, as we have only analysed a total of three time points, and it is almost impossible to keep all constraints constant.

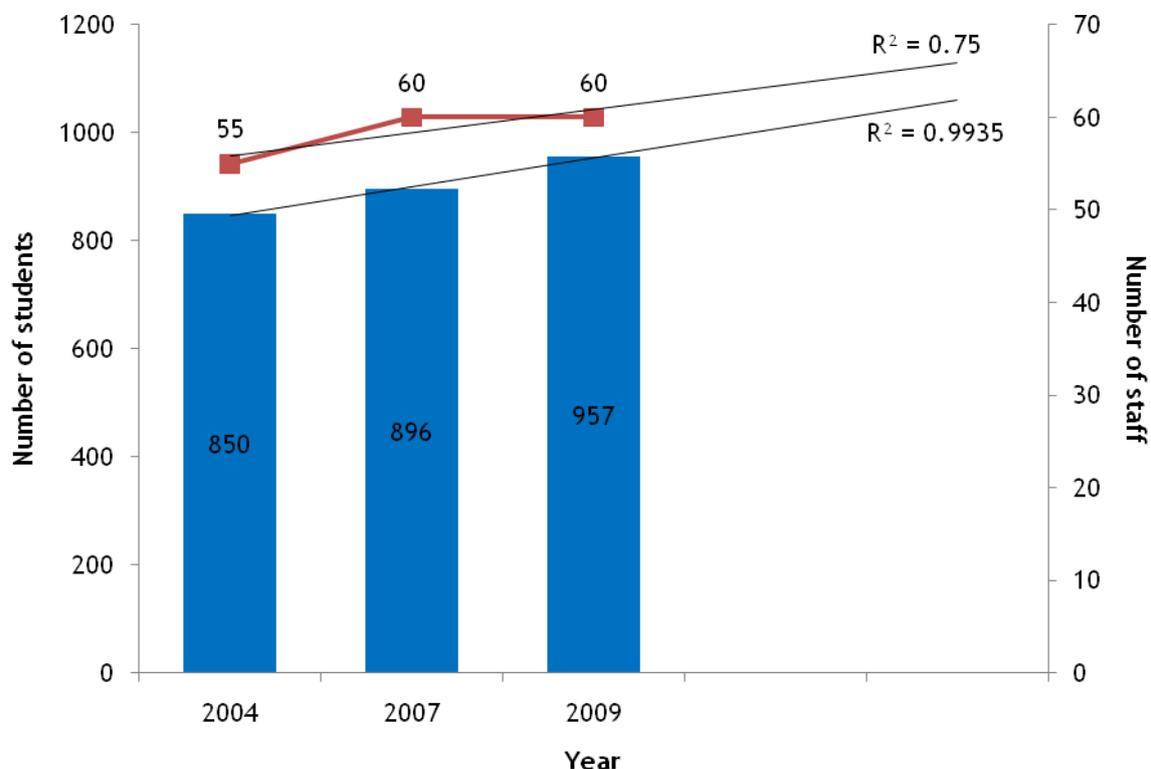


Figure 2: Predicting future student & staff numbers

More recently (2009) improvements have been noted in the relationship between the principal and the staff. The appointment of a principal in 2009 has triggered an improvement in the relationship between staff and principal, with the suggestion that the new principal is more open with the staff. A decline in disciplinary action (stand downs) has been attributed to a decrease in bullying, and effective decision-making processes using Cornerstone Values. In the recent 2007 to 2009 (but not 2004) time period, improvements have been noted in regard to vandalism, although it is recognised that “most vandalism is caused by students/people who do not attend this school. Usually done in the weekend or after hours”. Coupled with the improved relations noted between students in recent years, an improvement in student attendance has also been observed.

Section C: Conclusion

It is with some relief that we note the consistency in hand writing between the data collections so we are reasonably assured that the improvements identified are not a result of respondent variation. (1) In conclusion, Taupo-nui-a-Tia College has indicated that since the introduction of character education its impact has been “very significant”.

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To conclude, the impact of character education has been recognised, specifically in relation to the:

- Provision of a positive and supportive school environment
- Positive influences on school culture
- Increased co-operation between staff and students
- Creation of an atmosphere conducive to teaching & learning
- Improved attitudes of the students
- Attraction of students to the school

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- (1) The three questionnaires were completed in the same handwriting. The same person completing the questionnaire is likely to make consistent evaluations. Had different respondents completed the questionnaires response bias may have been introduced. For example, “Significantly improved” for one person could be just an “improved” for another. For longitudinal studies as much continuity of respondents as can possibly is desirable.