



An evolutionary approach: 'My Story'

Initiative: Great Start, Taita.

Theme: Creating and Sustaining Momentum

In community-led development one thing leads to another and everything has a lifespan. Just because one thing finishes doesn't mean its influences end though! Looking back is a great way to reveal these evolutions as Great Start Taita shows.

Following on from our previous story on 'My Story', given the success of children's involvement in Taita Park, it is not surprising perhaps that 'My Story' didn't stop there.

'My Story' has consistently refreshed itself since 2008 when it focused on each school group developing a Team Treaty, exploring what good leadership involves and working together as well as working on the park development. By 2010 the focus changed to connecting the school groups together and then with other people and activities in the community

A special connection had been the children getting to know, and developing a 'give-and-take' relationship with older Taita residents in the Aroha Care Centre across the road from Great Start - and getting to know a bit more about the history of Taita in the process. This led to the creation of 'Silver Lining', a group that welcomed and involved young and old from diverse backgrounds.

Another special connection developed out of the children's intentional noticing of changes in the community. For example, a desire to demonstrate the principles in the Team Treaty (like 'Virtues we know': courage, support and generosity) saw the children take home-baked biscuits to the local bakery in sympathy and support after it had been broken into for a third time. Through this act, the bakery owners connected with Great Start and many others, and were involved in celebrating Taita

neighbourliness on Neighbours Day in March 2011. In fact planning for the 2011 Neighbours Day happened in the bakery and they now provide a community notice board on site.

So 'My Story' is a very practical example of the children contributing to a better connected community because the things they notice are then also taken notice of by others who respect them. This develops the idea and practice of reciprocity.

Park Update

Our children have continued to take active roles in the local park development – participating in hui which explored renaming possibilities acknowledging Maori history. This entailed respectful dialogue with the descendent families of two of our area's important leaders – Wi Tako Ngatata and Sir Walter Nash.

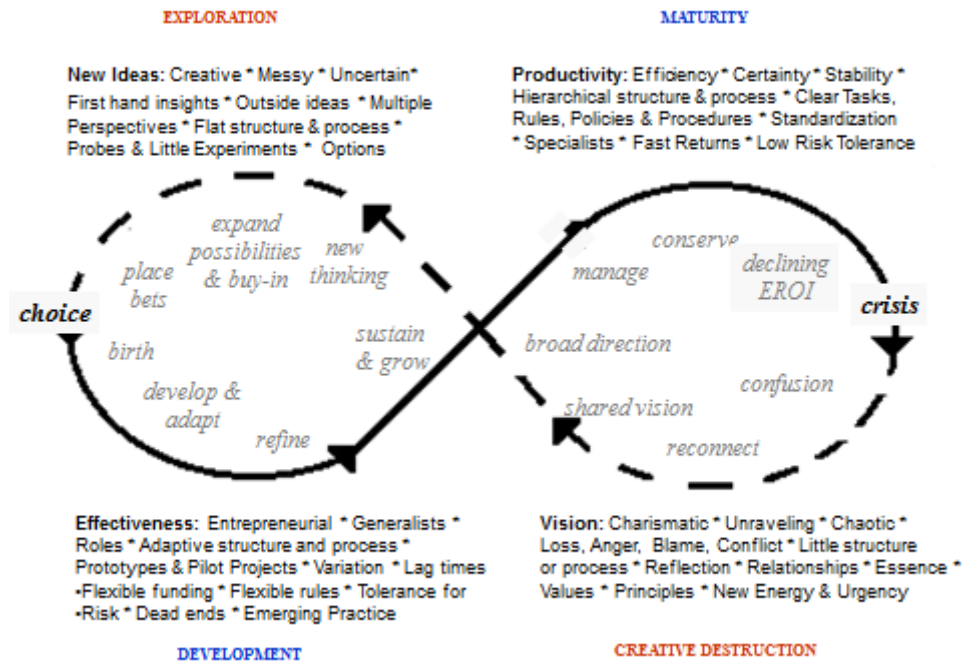
'Pou and Picnic in the Park' welcomed the pou (posts) carved by our friends at Rimutaka Prison which now adorn the playground entrance.

The installation of a new outdoor basket ball hoop was another opportunity for local people, young and old to come together, share kai, stories and play. The raising of that single hoop held special significance. Years earlier, during our initial door knocking ventures, seeking direction from the community, a youngster had made a simple request – "I just want a place I can do my basketball tricks". The door charges imposed by some of our impressive local sports facilities have put them out of reach for many of our low income families.

'My Story' ensures our children continue to be represented in local forums discussing local issues and brain storming solutions. Their letters and posters challenging the action of Housing New Zealand demolitions in our local Pomare Community were an important voice in the submissions as were the questions they raised just last week in a face to face meeting with the Mayor and local Councillors in relation to the multi- million dollar Taita development project currently being debated.

The reduction of staff and transitioning of management at Great Start in 2012 has impacted on how 'My Story' evolved this year. Some of the children took part in a child health project funded by regional public health which provided an excellent platform to on which to extend their community leadership roles. Others await an opportunity to get busy with new community initiatives. 'My Story' will continue to evolve as the next phase of Great Start is defined

This evolutionary approach demonstrates the 'renewal loop' (Cabaj, 2009) where, once maturity is reached in one area of focus, a reconnection occurs that brings new thinking and an expansion of possibilities which go on to be developed, refined, grown and sustained for as long as they are useful.



In fact, ideally, there are always activities going on at each phase of the renewal loop because that is how the overall structure remains relevant, effective and useful. The how and when will follow the necessary reflection process we are currently undertaking.

The relevance of 'My Story' is apparent in this community because our children's voices are now regularly invited to be part of community decision making and conversations. Our children are growing in confidence and experience in telling their stories and knowing their importance. Believing in yourself is a great tool for empowerment.

*Nau te rourou
Naku te rourou
Ka ora te iwi.*

Intent:

The inclusion of children at all levels of community development decision making and action taking

Key learnings:

- Continue to develop frameworks that work: how can this process be used again in a different context and/or for a different purpose?
- Consider using the renewal loop to work out what phase a project or activity is at and try to have things going on at all 4 phases to help build resilience across the programme.
- Children can act as catalysts for wider community engagement - recognise the ripple effects of an initiative and build on those too .

Key Outcomes:

- Children continue to be actively included in their communities and this is growing in both breadth and depth.
- Connections with the wider community are actively growing and this is impacting on the quality of life of residents, including those of the children involved , for example the children who went to the council to ask for a park now have a playground and a basketball hoop .

Key Contact:

Jeanette Higham jeanette.higham@greatstart.org.nz

Reference

Mark Cabaj (2009). Phases of Collaboration. *Engage to Create Vibrant Communities*. Volume 6, Issue 10. <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/engage/vol6issue10.pdf>

Story by Sue Rei and Denise Bijoux.

May 2012

