
A Walking Tale

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The following narrative attempts to document my frustration with the language developed by NZQA and my dismay at the uncritical adoption of an 'inputs' and 'outputs' approach to university management, staff assessment and reasons for research. It also expresses some of my exasperation with the lack of imagination evident in the unit standards and draft curriculum for health and physical education.

There was a time when children walked because they wanted to. But, like always happens somebody noticed that some babies walked earlier and sharper than others. So townsfolk made inquiries and found that a particular family with a large kitchen and a wood burning stove produced smart walkers at 11 months. So many fathers, keen to have elegant walkers in their families, asked this family to facilitate the walking of their babies. At first this was an informal arrangement and worked well. The kitchen was large and warm with many doors in which babies could hang in specially constructed bouncing frames. Each baby was given lots of cuddles and rock'n'roll music and baby laughter echoed off the wooden walls of the kitchen.

However as more menfolk heard about the successes of the baby walking kitchen more babies were brought to the kitchen doors for walking facilitation. Chaos disrupted the baby bouncing. Meetings were held and it was decided that walking kitchens were a public good that should be properly funded and organised. Thus assistants were hired by the townsfolk to help the smart walking parents cook and clean, change nappies and hang the bouncing frames. Initially these assistants were mothers of grown children so they were happy to cuddle, smile and talk to the babies and help with the bouncing when they were not cooking or cleaning or hanging bouncing frames.

The walking kitchen flourished such that demand outstripped the capacity of the original kitchen to hang and bounce babies while keeping them happy. Plans were made to extend the kitchen and build many more doors for bouncers but the arrangements and timetabling of the bouncing, cooking, cleaning and keeping the woodstove burning were so complex that the townsfolk appointed an energetic father

to handle all these arrangements and gave him the official title of Walking Clerk (WC).

Again chaos was averted and the walking kitchen continued to flourish under the direction of the WC. However as time passed it began to be noticed that quite a few of the babies attending the walking kitchen were not walking at 11 months and even more babies were not walking but persisted in toddling until they left aged two. So the WC began to take notes about what was happening in the doorways of the school. He noticed that often some of the cleaning did not get done because the cleaners and cooks were smiling at and cuddling the babies. So he issued some Walking Assistant Guidelines (WAGs) about what the cleaners and cooks should or should not do. He also noticed that the assistant facilitators did not bounce the babies in the same way as the original bouncers so he wrote out some Facilitator Assistant Guidelines (FAGs). He also suggested that the bootee knitting and gossip that many walking facilitators and their assistants did while bouncing and cuddling the babies was an ineffective use of time and energy so should be minimised.

Although demand for the walking kitchen continued and the FAGs and WAGs were implemented carefully and monitored continuously by the WC more babies became apathetic about walking - reluctant even to toddle - and somewhat whingey in their bouncers. Further meetings of the townsfolk took place to address this Crisis of Walking (COW). The WC at these meetings argued passionately and brilliantly for proper preparation of walking facilitators. So it came to pass that the first Walking Institute (WI) was established to instruct official Baby Walking Facilitators (BWF). A Chief Effective Walking Clerk (CEWC) was appointed and staff were hired to develop and teach courses in Cooking, Cleaning, Baby Communication (smiles, gestures and baby talk), Stove Stoking, Wood Chopping, Harness Making and Bouncing Techniques.

Although the official BWF did seem to improve the walking of the babies in the various Walking Kitchens (WKs) that had sprung up in other towns it was clear that the COW persisted. So more rigorous courses were developed in Baby Function and Baby Behaviour as well as Record Keeping and Cost Calculating. Also research programmes were initiated to determine essential aspects of facilitating baby walking. Investigations were begun into harness making and design, doorway constructions, length and volume of baby crying, gurgling and laughing, bounce intensity duration and frequency as well as the shape and appearance of facilitators. Many significant correlations were calculated. In addition Chief Walking Assistant Clerks (CAWCs)

were appointed along with Deputy Assistant Walking Clerks (DAWCS) to write Walking Instruction Manifestos (WIMs) which defined the essential parameters of cleanliness, wood stack tidiness, length and duration of bounces, optimal room and stove temperatures, harness material specifications and the expected number of bounces that should result in baby walking otherwise known as Walking Outcome Targets (WOT).

It has now become clear that the escalating COW is the result of the unregulated proliferation of WIs and WCs so that there is an unacceptable variation in the standards of the BWFs. So it is pleasing to note that a National Office for Walking Training (NOWT) has been established to implement a rigorous Standards Assurance Programme (SAP) to ensure that all staff practices are consistent with the international standards set by the original WI. All employees will now be required to interview one another and write guidelines to direct their practice. Each WI staff member will be required to compile formal dossiers of their media effectiveness and their commitment to WIMs. Statistics are to be kept on the number of facilitators trained, the number and cost of doorways and walking kitchens and the average number of bounces required before a baby walks. Records are kept of the time it takes for each baby to walk, the minutes that each baby cries and time spent laughing by each baby. Staff at WIs are to be rewarded on a points system so that those staff who instruct BWFs to facilitate baby walking with their clients laughing the most, crying the least and walking in shortest time are paid more and promoted faster. It is also reassuring that research staff will continue to be rewarded primarily for their media effectiveness. But most gratifying is the public acceptance of SAPs as it seems to be the only effective and transparent way of dealing with the present COW in this country.

MORAL: COWs can be stopped by WIMs written by CEWCs, CAWCs and DAWCs provided they conform to SAPs devised by NOWT to produce WOTs.