

Primary Principals Sabbatical Leave

Sabbatical Report

Personalising Learning in the Digital Age

Wendy Gray

Principal

Napier Intermediate School

Napier

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Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly acknowledge the schools and educators I have talked to while travelling particular Gylemuir school in Edinburgh and Nick Smith and Annie Page from the International division in Edinburgh.

After talking to many educators overseas it is important to acknowledge the opportunity to take sabbatical that Primary Principals in New Zealand are given by the Ministry of Education. Many of the colleagues I met were envious of this opportunity.

I would finally like to acknowledge the contribution, support and understanding of the Napier Intermediate Board of Trustees and the work of Louise Taylor, Jonathan Arnold and Darryl Bryce in my absence.

Background

Since 2007 when we began the rebuilding project at Napier Intermediate I have been looking at modern teaching environments and how they are also reflected in the way teachers facilitate learning and the ways students learning.

We spent quite a lengthy process looking at our current pedagogy in the 18 months prior to developing the plans for the new buildings.

Three quarters of the school was to be replaced with only a refurbished Hall and four classrooms remaining.

As part of our professional learning development during the two years before planning started, each team of teachers was given funding to investigate the current best practice and the implications for us as a school around several topics: Differentiated learning, Inquiry Learning, Student voiced, student leadership, and ICT.

Out of this study came new directions for our school and the differentiated learning changed to personalised learning. This was further supported by the directions given to us in the new New Zealand Curriculum.

Two of the three classroom blocks we have built have very flexible learning spaces and the three classrooms in each open up into a single area with lots of spaces that students can withdraw into.

The furniture for these blocks consists of tables of different heights and configurations, ottomans, a lot more open space.

Five staff went to Melbourne to a personalised learning 3 day course towards the end of 2009. (I was one of the staff) Although three staff had to operate at the beginning of the following year in conventional classes before moving in Term 2 into the first new building they decided to begin the process of changing the teaching style within the three rooms to one of personalising the learning for each student.

The academic, social and behavioural results achieved by these three staff was substantial. However with an unexpected change to the staff and the desire to spread the process across the school in hindsight we moved too quickly and at the end of 2011 we had lost a lot of what we had gained in 2010.

The investigation for this sabbatical has come from the desire to see where to go next in our journey towards developing personalising learning to better prepare students for the goals identified in the New Zealand Curriculum.

Insert New Curriculum statement re lifelong learners

Overview

Personalised Learning in the Digital Age changed as I went forward with my study. It widened to include the use of tools to assist personalised learning. From the reading I was doing alongside the travel it also widened to include

work by Marzano, John Loughran and work by Boykin and Noguera around their work on teaching and learning and the role of the teacher in this process.

Methodology

There are three strands to the information included. I have used Gylemuir Primary as my source of information from a school as it was the one with the most relevance to the topic. I attended the Ulearn Conference 2011 in Rotorua and Thirdly was able to read widely on the direction the sabbatical took me.

Activities

Gylemuir School is an Edinburgh Primary school Year 1 to 7 and has 420 students. They also have a Pre school of 120 students.

The new Scottish curriculum has many similarities to New Zealand and the focus on Active Learning and Skills for life has many echoes in our own curriculum.

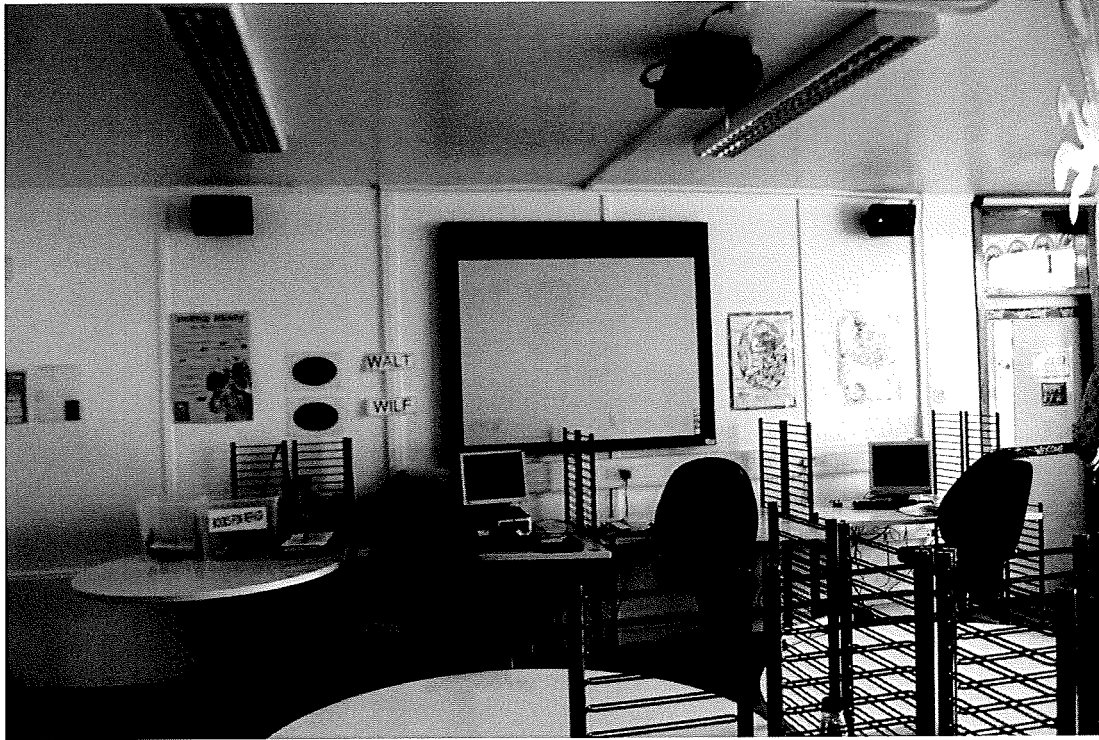
Glyemuir is involved in target setting for individuals and for the school strategic planning. WALTs and WILFs are part of all planning.

Learning outcomes are broken down and there is a clear skills development for students. Teachers are involved in forward planning 4 times a year.

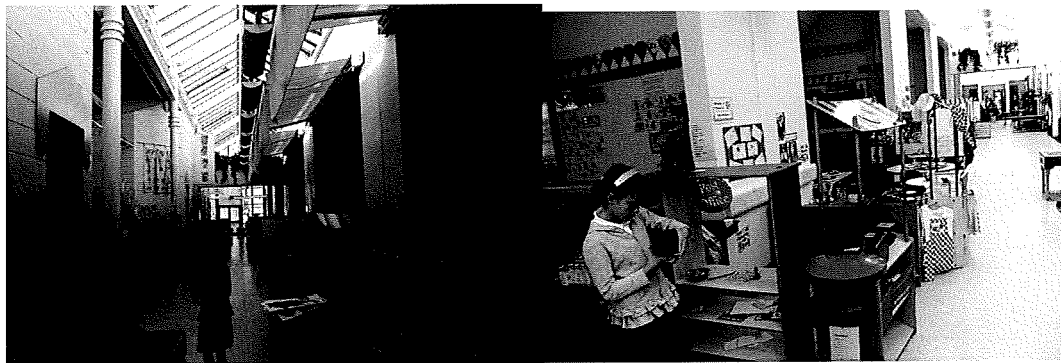
There is a focus on staff professional development.

The school is very geared to 'customer service'. All staff are on deck when there is the most impact i.e.... first thing in the morning and then again when children are released from school. This is a technique from Marks and Spencer stores.

The senior management team has also approached a successful local business chain and has taken part in their staff professional development.

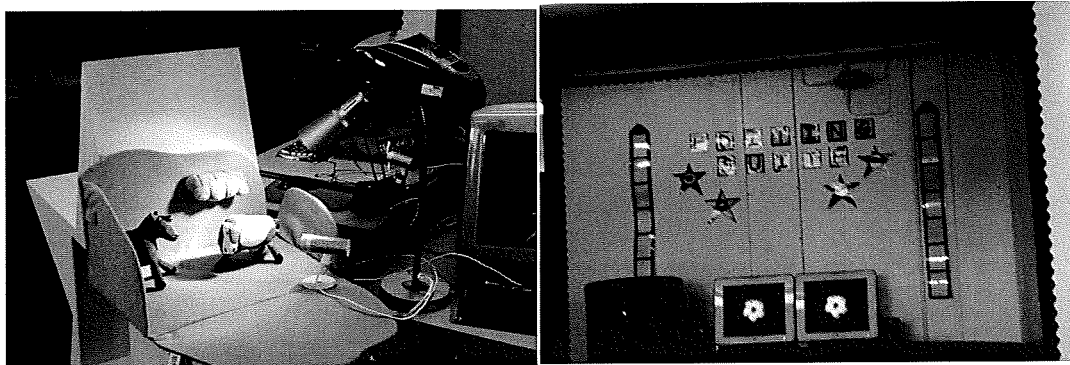


There is evidence of ICT in all classrooms with desktops available to all children to work on in much the same way as in New Zealand. The newer classrooms are open at one end to provide movement between classes. This is currently the junior classes with older children in traditional learning spaces.





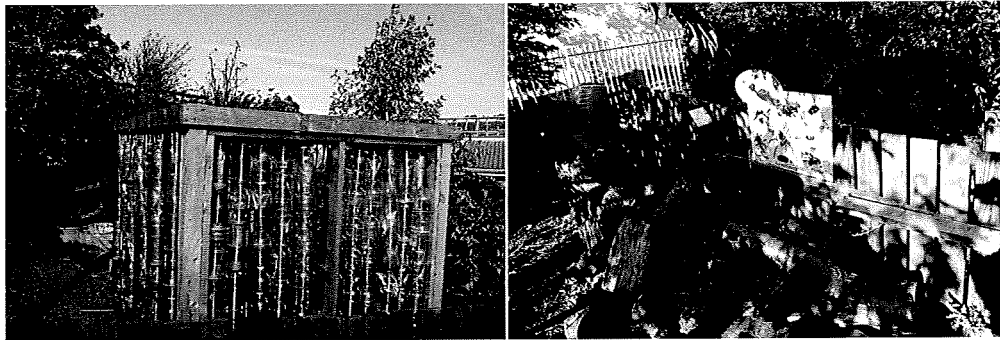
Interactive whiteboards are in all classes and teachers are making good use of these as tools for classroom instruction. There is also a media suite and a dedicated teacher.



In the foyer there is a photo screen display of the activities students are involved in throughout the school. Alongside of this are large stars with a physical display of classroom archives.



The school is also focused on sustainability with a garden area with projects for all year levels and a peace garden at the front of the school. The students manage all these areas.



A bottle greenhouse, a beetle and bug area, a fairy circle, vegetable garden and Willow house with seating inside



I visited a large number of areas available to students within tourist institutions. Almost all tourist attractions cater for students with separate areas or with activities throughout the attraction.

The majority of activities in these areas were hands on activities. Some involved manipulating pieces of puzzles to complete the knowledge. Some involved role-play with authentic reproductions. Others involved using actual items from history and interacting with history. Students could become

archaeologists, playwrights, and work on actual Elizabethan farms.



The Scottish museum had the most extensive using of media in relation to these types of activities. However it was the most recently developed attraction that we visited and had been developed for interactive use by visitors.

Inset Photos



Many smaller museums had staff employed in character for the period depicted so that students could get a real feel for the time. Schools were able to dress up and participate fuller in many of these attractions. Kits of artifacts could be purchased so that students could use items back in the school setting as well so that the learning experience could be extended beyond a visit.



School holiday programmes were also available in many of these attractions although museums needed adults to accompany children.

These items were well used and the range was extensive.

Part Two

On returning to New Zealand I attended the ULearn Conference in Rotorua and attended lectures on Whanau engagement using social media, Graeme Aitken –Keynote Speaker, Jan herrington,David Anderson, Julia Atkin and Cheryl Doig.

The following are the ideas that I have taken from them to inform my thinking and this thinking has had significant implications for my practice as I look with new eyes on the process of personalising learning within the school I am currently the leader

In the first workshop on Whanau Engagement, discussion centered around 6 levels of Whanau engagement, knowing your current practice, knowing the key groups involved and deciding what you want to accomplish.

The use of social media in the widest sense and the purposes behind the use was also discussed. As a group the concensus was that some parents are happy to use social media ,but do want to have face to face contact about their child as well. There was agreement that emails are by far the most used form of media by parents to contact staff.

For visibility it is important to make sure that your website delivers what you want it to. It needs to be easy for parents and others to navigate and must provide the variation of information the different stakeholders wish to access.

Graeme Aitken's message was much more succinct. Judge any innovation against the extent it will help students learn and the extent it will help them engage and build confidence and success.

He discussed innovation with cautionary words and warned that it is not always successful. Our history of education is littered with examples of this. We need to look at three measures of success.

1. Learning has been successful judged by student achievement
2. Greater interest or engagement has been achieved
3. Greater confidence has been gained.

If we meet all three then the innovation shows a measure of success and there has occurred effective teaching time. Without all three there is a risk.

Real Innovation has alignment, engagement and success.

Alignment must exhibit

- clear goals
- Success criteria that sets differentiated challenge
- Monitoring
- Time to monitor and support in person
- Receiving immediate feedback from peers and also the teacher.

Engagement must exhibit

- Control of the content
- Working at your own pace
- Determining your own direction
- Setting a level of challenge
- Working collaboratively
- Clear goals and success criteria

Confidence must exhibit

- Less need for public questions
- Reveal hidden experts
- Support for peers
- Teacher has time to assist
- The cognitive load is manageable
- Own pace
- Own direction
- Clear goals.

Jan Herrington discussed the use of students mobile devices in terms of their authentic learning. She set out 9 elements for authentic learning and commented that 'hands on is better for sustained or deeper learning, authentic learning. This works in well with mobile devices.

1. Physical environment that reflects a real life context
2. Tasks that have a real world task
3. Expert performance
4. Multiple perspectives
5. Collaboration
6. Articulation
7. Reflection
8. Scaffolding and coaching
9. Authentic assessment

She had questions to ask as we consider the value for students

What does the student do? (We must enable the curriculum needs of the student)

Who uses the technology, teachers or students?

How long does it take? (Needs to have depth)

Is there collaboration?

Is there a polished product?

Is there a showcase or forum for the product?

David Anderson discussed developing effective teams and the make up of high functioning teams.

In any team success is the result of people working together to achieve a result. They have committed to work together to achieve the results they want. The context is irrelevant if it is the team effort that is needed to achieve success.

A high functioning team has the following characteristics.

- Professional respect
- Time to have quality discussions
- Time to connect as people
- All equal
- High trust

Finally Julia Atkin discussed examining our practices as leaders of learning.

She talked about phases of development. Tacit, Explicit, deliberate Thinking, Deliberate conscious, and reflective inventive.

She followed this up with two components Transactional and transformational which have to work together. All the time posing questions. Why am I doing what I am doing?

Are you clear about what you believe and value as a leader?

She discussed the need for dialogue not debate, where you ask questions to draw out the underlying meaning. Where you as the leader need to actively listen and providing guidance that leads others to greater clarity.

She ended with the need for leaders to develop a partnership through shared vision and understanding and to engage in co-creating.

Part Three

Effective learning is involvement and understanding. Involvement being Task involvement vs ego involvement and understanding being to locate in context, to perform(thinking). Effective learning needs certain basic conditions.

- Intrinsic motivation
- Alignment
- Environment
- Attribution

Marzano meta analysis of research on what works in schools. He draws on the work of the majority of current educational researchers including John Hattie to translate research into an action plan. He discusses three dimensions that affect student achievement: school level factors, teacher level factors and student level factors.

These factors then have actions or steps that schools can take to be highly effective in enhancing student achievement.

For a teacher the starting point is the student. The three factors Marzano lists are

1. Home Environment
2. Learned intelligence and background knowledge, and
3. Motivation.

Each of these have steps or actions to follow.

1. Teachers need to work with parents
2. Students should be mentored. They should be involved in decision making about their learning. There should be a strong connection between the student and the teacher. The teacher should know the child.
3. The student should be provided with tasks and activities that are engaging for them. There should be immediate feedback on knowledge and skills gained. They should be involved with projects of their own design and we should teach them about the dynamics of motivation.

There are strong links with the message coming through from the speakers at the Ulearn conference.

For me as a leader the starting point is the teachers.

1. Instructional strategies
2. Classroom Management
3. Classroom curriculum design

Again each of these have steps or actions to take.

1. Provide teachers with an instructional framework for units that employ research based strategies. This is very broad as it allows for the needs of the students and the teachers
2. Have teachers articulate and enforce a comprehensive set of classroom rules and procedures. Have teachers use specific strategies that reinforce appropriate behaviour and recognise and provide consequences for inappropriate behaviour. Institute a school wide approach to behaviour. Help teachers develop a balance of moderate dominance and moderate co-operation in their dealings with students. Provide teachers with an awareness of the needs of different types of students and ways of alleviating those needs. Have teachers employ specific strategies to maintain or heighten their awareness regarding the actions of the students in their classes and finally have teachers employ specific strategies that help them maintain a healthy emotional objectivity with their students.
3. Three principles are the basis for Manzano's action steps.
 - Learning is enhanced when a teacher identifies specific types of knowledge that are the focus of the unit or lesson.
 - Learning requires engagement in tasks that are structured or are sufficiently similar to allow for effective transfer of knowledge.
 - Learning requires multiple exposure to and complex interactions with knowledge.

The five actions are

1. Have teachers identify the important declarative and procedural knowledge in the topics that are to be the focus of instruction.

2. Have teachers present new content multiple times using a variety of input modes
3. Have teachers make a distinction between those skills and processes students are to master versus those they are not
4. Have teachers present content in groups or categories that demonstrate the critical features of the content
5. Have teachers engage students in complex tasks that require addressing content in unique ways./

The school level has five factors.

1. Guaranteed and viable curriculum
 2. Challenging goals and effective feedback
 3. Parental and community Involvement
 4. Safe and orderly Environment
 5. Collegiality and Professionalism
1. The first is really specific to the USA system and has limited application here
 2. Implement an assesment system that provides timely feedback on specific knowledge and skills for specific students. Establish specific challenging achievementgoals for the school as a whole and establish specific goals for individual students
 3. Establish vehicles for communication between schools and parents and the community. Establish multiple ways for parents and community to be involved in the day to day running of the school.
 4. Establish rules and procedures for behavioural problems. Establish clear schoolwide rules and procedures for general behaviour. Establish and enforce appropriate consequences. Establish a program that teaches self discipline and responsibility to students. Establish a system that allows for the early detection of students who have a high potential for violence or extreme behaviour
 5. Establish norms of conduct and behaviour that engender collegiality and professionalism. Establish structures that allow for teacher involvement in decisions and policies for the school. Engage teachers in meaningful staff development activities.

Findings

One of the clearest point I have ascertained is that It is not about the tools that we are using digital or other. It is about how we could use all the tools, both digital and others to better our practices and the practices of our students as we all continued our individual learning journeys.

To be successful with personalising learning so many factors need to be addressed and interwoven in to the school culture that the complexities of success and failure with our ideas need much more collaboration between all those involved. It means giving time to the process of innovation. It means giving time to the reflections against criteria, tools, and for all stakeholders. It means open dialogue about difficulties encountered, It means analysis of the data to ensure that effective learning is taking place. It means looking closely at alignment , engagement and success. It is about what successful teachers need to do. It is about what successful schools need to do and it is ultimately the learning we can take from what successful students need to do

Bringing it all together.

At Napier Intermediate School it is going back to have the dialogue about our way forward with personalised learning. Out of this dialogue will come clear goals, success criteria that sets differentiated challenge, monitoring, time to monitor and support in person and the opportunity for staff to receive immediate feedback.

Students will need to have control of the content, be working at their own pace, determining their own direction, been given a level of challenge, working collaboratively and have clear goals and success criteria

Students must exhibit less need for public questions, be revealed as hidden experts, provide support for peers, supported by teachers who have time to assist. The cognitive load will need to be manageable with students operating at their own pace with a clear understanding of their direction and goals.

As a staff we will look at the ideas behind motivation, instructional strategies, classroom management and classroom curriculum design.

As a school we will consider parent and community, recognition of the cultural diversity and the need to understand the art and science of teaching and learning with our focus on personalising the learning for better student achievement.