

# Primary Principals Sabbatical 2016

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**Focus:** To research how design process of New Zealand schools that have been remodelled, enables their vision for teaching and learning and to explore the change process to facilitate the shift to desired teaching and learning practice.

### **Acknowledgements:**

It has been a privilege to receive this sabbatical. This opportunity has provided time and space to reflect on my topic and take a break from my role as a school leader outside the busyness of the school day. Thank you to those who have supported this opportunity:

- the Ministry of Education for giving me the opportunity for Sabbatical Leave.
- the Freemans Bay School Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical application, particularly Peter Bateman, Board of Trustees, Chairperson for his encouragement.
- the staff of Freemans Bay School who carried an extra work load during my absence. Janis Powley (Deputy Principal), Anne Cawley (Assistant Principal) who stepped up in their leadership roles, leading the school in my absence.
- My friends and family who continue to put up with my obsession with school design and pedagogy.

### **Reporting:**

This report shares findings from my research completed during my sabbatical in term 3, 2016. It encourages all those involved in the design process of remodelling school property, to strategically consider the school vision around learning and the school context ensuring that design elements are related to desirable learner outcomes and supported by appropriate teacher pedagogy.

## Rationale:

In 2010 at Freemans Bay School we demolished a large subsidising classroom block and built two new learning hubs in a two storied building. The building design was scoped to develop flexible learning spaces. The remaining school buildings have been identified as either leaky or past their use by date. Freemans Bay School is in the Ministry of Educations (MOE) new schools building project. A new school has been designed and construction commenced in July 2016.

The challenge of totally rebuilding Freemans Bay School sparked my interest in thinking deeper about how spaces are designed to reflect the school's vision around teaching and learning.



The NZ curriculum promotes a vision of “*confident, connected, actively involved lifelong learners*”. MOE property division explains their policy on their [website](#): that all schools “*have vibrant, well connected, innovative learning environments (ILE) that encourage and support many different types of learning*”.

All new school property upgrades are being built according to “*Innovative Learning Environments*” ILEs that have been used in schools both in New Zealand and internationally since the early 2000s.

The goal is to provide learning spaces that will support shifting teacher practice from teacher-led to a learner-led approach, supporting the UNESCO four pillars of learning that underpin the New Zealand curriculum:

- Learning to Know
- Learning to Do
- Learning to Live Together
- Learning to Be

This sabbatical provided an opportunity to challenge the assumption that ILE spaces designed generically for more flexibility, collaboration, and more student choice over where and how they are learning will change teacher practice to a more personalised pedagogy.

This sabbatical provided an opportunity to explore how MOE & schools invest in time and practice to define and evolve their approach to their vision around teaching and learning. At what stage of the design process do schools develop a common belief of what practice will look like in their new ILE spaces and how do they test alignment with their vision of teaching and learning?

## **Methodology**

- Literature review – books and web resources
- Visits to schools in New Zealand that have been remodelled
- Interviews with principals and leadership team
- Interviews with education design experts both within New Zealand and overseas.

## Findings

The Ministry of Education policy on Innovative Learning Environments is underpinned with a philosophy that the ILEs will in fact cause educational practices to change to learning pedagogy that is personalised, collaborative and flexible.

The Third Teacher book was created by an international team of architects and designers who explored the critical link between how learners learn and the school environment. Loris Malaguzzi who founded the Reggio Emilia approach contends that the physical environment is the third teacher, (after other adults and other children) and will cause shifts in teacher practice.

Observations of teacher practice in remodelled spaces and discussions with school principals indicated the new spaces did not necessarily change teacher practice. The aesthetics were better but often rooms will have filled with desks and chairs, utilising bookshelves and display units as “class” dividers and each teacher delivering their lessons from the front of the room the same as they were in their previous standalone classrooms. The new design solutions reflected no change in the way that teaching was happening. All schools visited aspired for more personalised learning and believed that their remodelled school design was an enabler, however it was difficult to achieve without the investment needed in expertise and time with teachers to develop new approaches.

A common scenario in terms of the remodelling or new school building design is that the school design team lacked an educational consultant at all stages of the design process. Typically, in New Zealand, design teams are led by a Ministry of Education project manager which includes an architect, a quantity surveyor, school principal, leadership team members and Board members. The external design review team has no educational consultant involved in the design review process. Both teams are made up mainly of technical professionals.

In UK and Scandinavia, the design project team is led by an educational consultant who oversees developing the educational drivers from early concept brief stages of design and ensures that the link between educational vision and desired learning pedagogy is a priority.

In this model an educational consultant will work with the leadership team, staff and community to create a shared language and concepts between design and educational vision. There is funding in the project to invest the time and expertise needed to develop the briefing that the architect will translate into design spaces.

In this scenario the concept brief and concept design stages have a very strong focus on the education vision and the educationalists and the architect work in tandem to ensure that the school vision for learning is the driver for the design. Parallel to this process the school leadership team and staff continue to have time and opportunities to consider ways to develop practice in the new spaces and once the remodelling is complete, the educational consultant continues to work with the school community to develop and evaluate how new ways of teaching and learning are developing.

In the New Zealand model there is no funding in the redevelopment project for an educational consultant to work throughout and beyond the new school build, with school communities to develop shared beliefs, break down barriers to new ways of thinking and achieve new solutions.

The design of buildings is not enough. To change learning culture and practices collaboration is needed from design phase to evaluation of new practices. This process needs to be resourced. Unless teachers are prepared and provided with the necessary time and expertise to develop new ways of working, the newly renovated spaces will not move them to innovative technologies and teaching practices.

## **Conclusion**

The Ministry of Education's policy of ILE has the intent to enable educational practices to evolve and change leading to better learning outcomes for learners. The experiences indicated in literature reviews and school observations is that the physical design is only one component. New design solutions will not, on their own change the way that teaching and learning happens.

Visits to schools exposed that the school leaders aspired for pedagogy change and more personalised, collaborative and flexible learning. They believed that the school design supported their aspirations but in terms of pedagogical practice – little had changed.

Discussions with overseas experts revealed a design process model that had an educational consultant resourced throughout and beyond the new build project budget to work with the school community on mapping forward their desired school vision on learning. The educationalist supported the process prior to design stages and through to evaluation on how the spaces were utilised and how teaching and learning had changed to support the school vision for learning.

## **Recommendations**

It is important that every school embarking on a school ILE redevelopment consider how to realise their vision for teaching and learning through a collaborative process with their school communities and project team.

The Ministry of Education should support this process to ensure that the project budget includes resourcing to invest time and expertise to support schools to evolve their pedagogy and design.

The design team needs to focus on what the learning will look like to determine design elements that will support the school vision around learning. For schools to utilise design to reflect their vision of learning in terms of space and pedagogy they need to collaborate to agree what actual practice in the new learning spaces will look like. This needs to be developed collaboratively and tested.

Resourcing a process to support teachers to develop shared concepts between design and teaching and learning practice will break down barriers and achieve new solutions and better outcomes for learners.

Focusing on resourcing teachers to collaborate around what the learning experiences in the new spaces will look like and testing their new ways of working will give traction on the shift from teacher-led education to learner-led education.

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