'What might future focus education look like in a primary school setting?'

Sabbatical Report

Term 3 2017

Sue Heath

Hawea Flat School

Acknowledgements

The time away from school was spent reading and reflecting on future-focused education and clarifying my own understanding and beliefs around the highly complex job of leading learning in our setting.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Hawea Flat School Board of Trustees for fully supporting my application and the Ministry of Education for giving me the opportunity to undertake a sabbatical.

A huge thank you to Jodie Howard who took on the role of Acting Principal so capably and to all the staff for the support they provided while I was away.

Thanks also to the principals and staff of schools that I visited. It is always a privilege to hear of others' journeys.

Executive Summary

As is often the case, one question leads to another and as I reflected on readings, made connections and clarified my thinking about some aspects of my practice, I find that there is still a lot more reading, critical thinking and inquiring to be undertaken.

The key things to come out of this sabbatical for me have been:

1. Commitment to being part of the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Global Partnership. This has provided a coherent framework for system wide change that will ensure that our school continues to improve and remains focused on doing the best for our students, community and beyond.

2. The importance of growing leadership capability across the school.

3. Developing an action plan so that we remain focused on the things that matter most.

4. Planning for retirement.

Purpose

The purpose of the sabbatical in terms of my own professional learning was to inquire into how future focused concepts could be reflected in our school's local curriculum. I spent time deepening my understanding of future focused education by reading and reflecting on current literature and research, attending workshops where there was a focus of future focused learning and evaluating how the current practice at my school aligns with the research.

By the end of the sabbatical I planned to have a plan in place that included a review of our school curriculum as well as how to engage with our school community in examining what future focused education might look like in our setting.

While that was the plan, like many things the reality was somewhat different. The more I read and reflected the more questions I had. So this report has evolved into a series of questions and reflections that will keep me engaged and focused on leading learning for the next year or two!

Key Questions

What is the purpose of education today?   What does future focused education look like?

One of the questions I grappled with early on in my sabbatical was to think critically about 'What is the purpose of education today?' Educational reforms are happening all over the world and New Zealand is no different. New Zealand schools are able to take the vision the government has for our young people and use that to develop with their local community a vision for their school.   Our school charter will be reviewed in 2018 so it is timely for our community to think about the changes that are happening in education and the opportunities this provides for our school and community.   There are various definitions for the purpose of education but most include things like *'understand the world and human beings'*, *'enable people to live rich, happy and healthy lives'.* Sir Ken Robinson's definition, '*To enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens'* resonated with me, particularly the phrase 'compassionate citizens' as it implies that one of the purposes of education is about those qualities that make us human. To be compassionate means that people will treat each other with respect and empathy, be tolerant of diversity and care about each other.

Few people would argue with the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum for 'future-focused learning in connected communities where every young New Zealander is a confident, connected, lifelong learner equipped to live a full and active life, and contribute to a thriving

and prosperous economy.' This along with the values, key competencies and principles gives us a cohesive framework to work with as we develop our charter and strategic plan with our local communities. This freedom and flexibility to engage with our local communities has its challenges but it is also one of the great strengths of our education system and allows us to tailor our local curriculum to meet the strengths, needs and interests of our students and the aspirations of our parent community.

The vision in the NZ Curriculum aligns with what Sir Ken identifies as the four big purposes for education:

1. **Education should enable students to become economically responsible and independent.**   This is not about preparing students to enter the workplace but rather about giving them skills of collaboration and creativity so that not only can they contribute to the economy but they will have the skills to lead a full and active life. There is more to life than just work!   Given the rapid pace of technological advancement, it is difficult for many of us to imagine what work people will be doing in 10, 20 or 50 years time. Who would have thought that the cartoons I watched as a child in the 1960s could become a reality e.g., 'The Jetsons' - robots doing the housework, driverless cars. The skills of collaboration and creativity and the ability to adapt are going to become increasingly more important as the work people do changes. *Wondering: What does collaboration and creativity look like at our school?*

2. **Education should enable students to understand and appreciate their own cultures and respect the diversity of others**. This is about being connected and is reflected strongly in the vision, values and principles in the NZ Curriculum. As we become more culturally diverse there is a real need for our young people to live respectfully with diversity. *Wondering: How do we acknowledge the Treaty of Waitangi at our school? How do we show we value other students' cultures?*

3. **Education should enable young people to become active and compassionate citizens.**
   The inequalities in society are reflected in schools so in order to become compassionate citizens there is a need for collaboration within and across schools and communities so that students can learn from and with each other. Schools can provide opportunities not just for students but also for teachers and parents to work collaboratively. *Wondering: What does it mean to work collaboratively with others?*

4. **Education should enable young people to engage with the world within them as well as the world around them.** *Wondering: What does it mean for teaching and learning to put the child at the centre?* There is a lot of talk about putting the child at the centre but how many of us truly do

this? Is the learning at our school being driven by individual student's interests, talents and dispositions?

When education is future focused what does leadership look like?

There has been so much written about different models of leadership that it can be quite overwhelming trying to work out where your leadership style fits as it changes depending on the context and the people involved. Like many of my colleagues the perspective articulated by Bogotch (2016) that 'leadership calls for us to act, not for us to follow the actions directed by others for others' fits well with me. When I thought more about the key aspects of leadership moving forward these are some of the more important ones for me:

- **Relationships** are the key so it is important that I build relational trust with staff, students, parents and the wider community along with external agencies and other schools.
- **Stay focused** on what matters - remembering the students are at the heart and everything we do should make a difference for them.
- Ensure that **deep learning** is happening for everyone, not just for students.
- **Model being a learner** - be a part of whatever professional learning is happening, the the more something makes you question and challenge your current practice the greater the opportunities for modelling what a growth mindset looks like and coming up with innovative ideas and practices.
- **Grow leadership capability** across the school. If initiatives are to be sustainable in the school, it is vital that everyone has ownership of these so that when there are staff changes the focus for direction remains, e.g., writing initiatives continue, The Nature of Science remains a priority. This will only be possible if we grow leadership capability across the school. While it is sometimes hard for principals to 'let go' and give others the opportunity to lead, it is critical that we do so. Given that teachers' workloads are already huge, providing support and mentoring for growing leaders can be a challenge but it is essential if we are to build leadership capability across the school.
- **Work collaboratively** - this is an area that needs to be unpacked further in order to determine what collaboration is and what it is not. For me collaboration happens when we work with others to do something that we would not be able to do on our own.

Prior to embarking on this sabbatical, I attended a CORE Education seminar on New Pedagogies for Deep Learning where Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn were two of the keynote speakers. Michael and Joanne had written the book *'Coherence - The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts and Systems' Michael Fullan, Joanne Quinn'* which provided a framework for system based change. For me it was an 'Aha' moment - here at last was a framework that epitomised what I believed was the way forward for our school. It was like we had all the parts and here was the overarching framework to hang everything from. I came away from the two days feeling inspired and passionate and convinced that the way forward

for our school was to be part of this global partnership. Becoming part of a global partnership along with other schools in our area has been an exciting new challenge and has provided opportunities for us to work collaboratively across schools to foster deep learning as well as building the leadership capability of teachers within our schools.

The Coherence Framework (*Coherence - Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn*)
The Coherence Framework identifies 4 key areas for leaders to focus on - *Focusing Direction, Cultivating Collaborative Cultures, Deepening Learning and Securing Accountability.*   The assessment tool provides a useful starting point to work through with teachers who have some leadership responsibility. It will give us a snapshot of how we are doing on each sub-item by identifying the evidence we have of each element. This in turn is likely to lead to some deep conversations around areas of strength and areas of greatest need and how we can move forward. Exciting times ahead!

While building leadership capacity across the school is not something new, Smardon and Charteris point out that 'there are changes in the digital and political landscape that increasingly require student, teacher and principal adaptability and leadership capacity.' Building that leadership capacity remains a priority and how that might happen and what it will look like is something for us to work on. Joan Dalton (2011) uses the term 'capabilities' rather than 'capacity' or 'competency'. Her rationale for this is that 'capabilities integrate personal qualities and dispositions with knowledge and skills. It's that combination that enables people to take effective and appropriate action in new and rapidly changing circumstances.' Joan identifies nine key capabilities which are all interrelated and interconnected. Different capabilities are used according to the pathway you are taking e.g., if relationships are the focus then the capabilities might be listen, inquire, build common ground, meta-reflect. Our Board of Trustees is very supportive of growing teachers' capability, including leadership capability. Using Joan's book to develop a shared 'big picture' view of the capabilities is likely to be our first step and then understanding the skills clusters that relate to each capability will be the next step.

When education is future focused what does the school curriculum look like?

If we are to put every child at the centre and fulfil the four purposes of education identified by Sir Ken Robinson and which are also the intent of the NZ Curriculum then we need to build relationships with students and their families, access a broad curriculum that is responsive to students' talents, create effective learning environments, and use technology. This is where our involvement in New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) project and the framework it provides comes into play. Within the framework there are 6 Deep Learning Competencies - The 6 Cs:
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Collaboration

- Creativity
- Character
- Citizenship

These competencies are focused on the well-being of the student as well as the well-being of the group and society as a whole. The links to the NZ Key Competencies and to our school's charter and values are readily apparent.   If we remain focused on developing these competencies, our children will have the skills to succeed in an increasingly complex world. We can help our children develop a sense of what is important to them in how they live their lives, what matters and is of value and what they are committed to being and doing. As John Dewey observed some 100 years ago, 'education is not preparation for life, it is life.' Like many schools in New Zealand, we have an inquiry-based approach to learning and putting the NPDL framework over the inquiry model that we use (Kath Murdoch's model) is blurring the distinction between living and learning and schooling.   There is an authenticity to learning tasks as students make sense of their world, work on identifying and solving problems within the school setting, their own community and beyond.

Countries around the world have emphasised literacy and numeracy skills for the last decade and while these are essential foundational skills equally important are the skills that allow students to think deeply and critically and have some say in what they are learning, how they are learning it and why. All this means that there is a shift in the a teacher's role. No longer are teachers the instructors or the givers of knowledge. Rather students need to be more engaged and have more of a say in their learning - there is a shift towards teachers and students being partners in the learning process.

As well as developing the 6Cs teachers also need to weave together the four quadrants if they are to support deep learning. These quadrants are:
- Pedagogical practices
- Learning partnerships
- Learning environments
- Leveraging digital

Pedagogical practices is about the need for teachers to have expertise in both instructional and assessment practices so that they can tune in to the needs and interests of their students making learning relevant, authentic and real.   John Hattie's work *Visible Learning* (2009) identified pedagogical practices that are likely to make the biggest difference for students. These included cognitive task analysis, giving feedback, teacher-student relationship, student expectations. Making sure that any feedback is timely, specific to the learning and will help to set the next challenge for the student's learning is something that we will continue to focus on. Learning partnerships between and among teachers, students and families also has the potential to make one of the biggest differences in outcomes for students according to work done in recent times by John Hattie. These partnerships have the potential to to create more

authentic learning and increase student engagement once students have the foundational skills.

The Student Learning Model as described in *Coherence by Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn* 'focuses on three elements of student development and the ways they become active participants in My Learning, My Belonging and My Aspirations.' It puts the student at the centre and then looks at what each of these elements means.

My Learning is about developing skills in metacognition as students gain an awareness of how they learn and begin to develop and monitor their own learning goals and success criteria. Feedback is an essential part of improving performance and it is the teacher's role to provide feedback that activates the next learning challenge for the student. Student agency is more than just participating; it's about engaging students in real decision making and a willingness to learn together. The second element, **My Belonging**, is about what makes us human - it's the purpose, meaning and connectedness to others. We all need to feel respected and that we belong. Developing and building relationships with others are skills for life and an integral part of authentic learning. The third element is **My Aspirations** and there is a lot of research that shows student results can be affected by the expectations students have of themselves and the perceptions they believe others have for them. We have all come across children who think they are no good at something, be it writing, sport, maths or something else. Families, students and teachers can all foster a sense of self efficacy sometimes just by talking about current and ideal expectations and what might make them possible to achieve. Tapping into students' curiosity about their world as well as their needs and interests to engage in deep learning tasks that are conceptually based will be a great place to start when reviewing our local school curriculum.

Leveraging digital is not about the technology but rather about how learning can be accelerated by making use of the digital world. There is no doubt that digital technologies are changing the way students learn. Learning can happen anywhere and at any time. We need to be thinking about how we use technology so that it is used during the process of learning and building collaboration within and outside the classroom in ways that are authentic and relevant. In this context, the use of ICT is not to present information but rather to construct knowledge that is new to the student. When leveraging digital, ICT tools are being used to help our students to collaborate, problem solve, self manage and innovate. Leveraging digital has been identified by staff at our school as an area they would like to develop further. When we reflected on how well we had used the four quadrants in one of our inquiries, it was the area that was not used as well as some of the others to deepen the learning for students.

When education is future focused what does the learning environment look like?
There is an expectation that all schools move towards creating Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) with clear guidelines from the Ministry of Education as to what schools

need to consider during the planning process. This information can be accessed at http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/Ile   If you are planning an ILE, this is a useful guide.

An ILE includes the physical, social and pedagogical context in which learning occurs. There have been times in the past when the emphasis has been too much on the physical environment with less attention given to the social and pedagogical context. When designing the space attention has to be given to learner needs. The learner should be at the centre and the space designed with this in mind. Some of our children have sensory, anxiety and behavioural challenges so spaces need to be able to accommodate these needs. Students will want access to different learning spaces so that they can be working on different things at the same time and teachers can be working with groups, individuals or the whole class. The space and furniture will need to be flexible enough so that students have some choice over whether they work collaboratively with others or on their own, and where they work - at tables, on the floor or at a study carrel. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that when teacher pedagogy and physical learning environments are matching there are significant gains to be made in achievement.' (Mark Osborne)

An ILE can provide far greater flexibility than traditional spaces as two classes may combine for team teaching or a class can be split into smaller groups and spread over different areas or different classes may combine studying complementary learning areas. There are fewer walls and often a common area or central teaching and learning space that can be shared. This can provide opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from each other. The access to resources can be better as the spaces can allow for a range of different activities all to happen at the same time.

The NZ Curriculum indicates that students learn best when they are:
- Actively involved in decision making
- Initiating learning
- Collaborating together
- Making connections within and across learning areas.

The physical environment in an ILE allows the teachers and the students to select the best location for learning. The design should allow for small or large group teaching, direct instruction, guided teaching or individual inquiry and learning, together with the opportunity to create specialist learning zones within the environment. The challenge for some of us is how to create an ILE with our existing buildings.

What might the teaching and learning look like?
In 2018, there will be the opportunity for two teachers at our school to work together in an ILE. It seemed timely to read some more about the different teaching strategies that could be used. From what I've read and seen there are six commonly used co-teaching strategies:

- One Teach, One Observe - These sessions are pre-planned and last for about 15 minutes. They are pre-planned for a specific purpose and the teacher observing may be learning from teacher taking the lesson, looking at the effectiveness of a particular teaching strategy, noticing the effect of the lesson on a particular student or group of students.
- Learning Coach - One teacher has the role of coaching specific students. The purpose of the coaching may be to provide support or feedback to a student or a group of students or to challenge them to take their learning further. The learning coach may well have expertise in a particular area. Often teachers will have pre-determined who they will assist. Where students are self-regulated and able to drive their own learning, this approach allows for a 'just in time' response allowing students to progress at their own pace.
- Targeted Teaching - This approach is often used in literacy and numeracy teaching and is usually needs/strengths based. Sometimes a workshop approach can be used with students opting in when they are either unsure about an aspect of their work or ready for a challenge; at other times groups of students with a similar need or strength will be targeted for small group instruction. Students not being taught will be engaged in other independent learning tasks (not necessarily literacy or numeracy based).
- Station Teaching - This approach has students going to different stations with teachers repeating the learning for different groups. This allows teachers to teach to their strengths and passions and has the potential for students with similar interests or passions to work with each other regardless of their year level. It reminded me very much of our passion projects where students suggest possibilities they would like to learn more about and then teachers and members of the wider school community become the station leader.
- Team Teaching - Both teachers are working with a large group at the same time. Students are mixed across classes.
- Experimental teaching - Learning is more personalised in this approach. This is an area that really excites me. Just imagine working with children who understand how they learn; own and drive their learning; co-design the curriculum and their learning environment. This is what personalised learning is all about.

The key messages I have taken from reading and visiting other schools are:
- When working in an ILE a variety of teaching approaches are used. Establishing strong and positive relationships is the key.
- If we want teaching to be effective we need to ask our students every step of the way what's working for them and what's not. We need to listen to them and let go, trust them and believe that they can and will succeed. Knowing when to step in and scaffold and support learners, when to challenge them to take their learning to the next level is the art of teaching.

- Model being a learner - find out what students already know and challenge them to find out more. Help them make connections and let them see that we are all learners. Make learning visible so that students know what they need to learn and how to achieve it and why they need to learn it.

Digital technologies will no doubt play an increasingly important part in what schooling might look like in the future. Just because we can google answers to questions doesn't mean that knowledge is not important, it is. We need to be apply this knowledge across a range of settings and use it to solve problems. Those higher order thinking skills are more important than ever as we interpret, analyse, synthesise and evaluate new knowledge.

There is no doubt in my mind that the advances in digital technologies are going to continue to change the face of education for everyone - students, parents, teachers. It is time for us to start thinking about how we organise and manage teaching and learning. The opportunities are there if we are brave enough to act. Right now, we know that learning can happen anywhere, at any time and at a pace that works for the learner. This has significant implications for the ways in which schooling is organised and managed. Digital technologies can be used to personalise learning for students giving them choice over where they learn, what they learn and how that learning occurs. Students can provide the evidence to support and demonstrate their achievement as learners and this can be shared with their teachers and parents who in turn can provide immediate feedback. In this scenario the student is very definitely at the centre and the system is there to support their needs and interests. Equally important is the ability for students and teachers to connect not only with each other but with people in other communities and countries.

Wonderings
- What are the alternatives to the way we currently organise our classes?
- Do our students have some say over the what, when how and why of their learning?

Actions moving forward
- Review the school charter and strategic plan using a future focused lens. Review the school curriculum to reflect the strategic goals. Our school's strategic plan is based around the UNESCO four pillars of learning. Is this still relevant?
- Use the Coherence Framework assessment tool to gain a snapshot of what is happening in each of 4 key areas of leadership. Use the information gathered from the assessment to plan a way forward with all teachers involved in the process.
- Use Joan Dalton's book *Learning Talk: Capabilities and Skills Book 3* to develop a shared big picture view of the 9 leadership capabilities (p10-11) Develop a shared understanding of the skills clusters that relate to each capability. Undertake the comprehensive Capability Assessment Tool for more in-depth analysis and learning. Complete individual and team profiles using templates P14

- Investigate Mind Lab's Postgraduate Certificate in Applied Practice (Digital and Collaborative Learning) www.themindlab.com as a way of growing teacher capability.
- Find out more about Infinity Maps - Annan and Wootton

Conclusion

My time away from school gave me the opportunity to read, reflect and come back feeling rejuvenated with a clear sense of where to from here. I am more convinced than ever that our involvement with the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning project has us well positioned for the future. It is an exciting time to be involved in education and the Coherence Framework has helped put all the pieces of the puzzle together. As a team, we will be looking for those opportunities to grow our own knowledge, particularly around digital technologies and leadership capabilities. We will be focused on deepening learning for our students and ourselves, fostering a collaborative culture and being very clear about where we are heading and why.

References

Fullam, M., Quinn, J. (2016) *Coherence.* Corwin. Ontario Principals' Council

Dalton, J. (2011) *Learning Talk: build capabilities.* Hands On Educational Consultancy Pty Ltd.

Ryan, T. (2018) *The Next Generation.* Wiley

Robinson, V (2018) *Reduce Change to Increase Improvement.* Corwin

Bray, B., McClaskey, K. (2015) *Make Learning Personal.* Corwin

New Zealand Principal June 2017 Volume 32, Number 2 *Sir Ken Robinson - A Daring Revolutionist* Liz Hawes Editor

ICT & Procurement 2016 / www.educationreview.co.nz *Innovative Learning Environments: Where's the Evidence?* Mark Osborne

Education Review Vol 8 Issue 2 2017 *Three Major Questions For Three Major Educational Thought Leaders*

New Zealand Principal November 2016 Volume 31, Number 4 *Leading Change in ILE: Building School Wide Leadership Capacity.* Dianne Smardon and Jennifer Charteris

Bogotch I. (2016) 'What and where is education today? A leadership perspective', *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* 19:1, 1-4, DOI:10.1080/13603124.2015.1096074

Klar, H., Huggins, K., Hammonds, H., & Buskey, F. (2016). Fostering the capacity for distributed leadership: a post-heroic approach to leading school improvement, *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* 19(2), 111-137. DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2015.1005028

Smardon, D., & Charteris, J. (2014). Strengthening teacher co-leadership through professional inquiry. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice,* 29(2), 73-83

Osborne, M. (2013) Modern Learning Environments CORE Education white paper