

**Karen McCulloch  
Pukekawa School**

**FOCUS: Professional Learning Activity**

To investigate modern teaching / learning pedagogy / practices and physical aspects associated with innovative learning spaces.

To explore how these can be implemented successfully into our school.

**BACKGROUND:**

During my eight years as Principal of Pukekawa School, the staff and I have strived to keep up with educational changes and current pedagogy. Initially this was working on the Ministry's *Assessment for Learning* initiative, followed by an in depth study of students' writing and the best practices to facilitate improved writing. This pedagogy flowed into all curriculum areas.

We, then worked with a cluster of local schools on a three year MOE *Information Computer Technology* contract. This provided skills and strategies to support our growing pedagogy. Pukekawa School joined a *Network for Learning* cluster, whose common goal was to improve / enhance teacher pedagogy / practice to lift student engagement and achievement.

From this professional learning and research, we really wanted to develop student agency leading further towards students driving their learning in a supportive, modern learning environment. We believe this is the way of the future.

The BOT sold the school house which has provided funds to combine / re shape and refurbish two rooms into an innovative / modern learning space. This is so exciting!

**We are ready to move forward- we have the desire, we will have the space.**

**Now we need more specific knowledge about how to make this happen.**

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of my sabbatical is, therefore, to further my own knowledge and understandings of

- What innovative learning is
- The advantages it has for students' learning and development
- How to prepare for and implement changes at Pukekawa School to effectively utilise our new innovative learning space
- How to keep our parents informed and "on board".

My research and networking with colleagues- Principals and Teachers leading and working in these innovative spaces will help me lead the change, support my staff, advise my board and our parent community. I will discover the most appropriate research, readings and places to visit, to share with my staff and board to build capacity with our teachers and governors.

The sabbatical will also allow time to clarify my thoughts, work on an action plan, reflect on the best way to move forward in order to achieve the best possible learning outcomes for our students.

## METHODOLOGY:

1. **Visits to schools** – some specifically built, some with newly built additions to the existing school, others with walls removed between classrooms

Stonefields            Te Kowhai            Ngatea            Vauxhall            Te Kauwhata            Hingaia  
Harrisville            Buckland            Tuakau            Ramarama            Pakuranga Intermediate

(I deliberately chose schools within a day's travel so that future teacher liaison / viewings could be possible)

2. **Discussion with Principals / teachers / students-**

Principals shared their schools' vision, strategic plan, community partnerships.

Teachers shared organisation- working as a team, software to support the learning, how they planned and what specific areas were used for and their excitement for the new improved teaching / learning. Students shared their thoughts about their learning, what they liked, if they felt supported, how they knew what to do, highlights and their favourite space and furniture.

It was interesting to hear about individual schools' journeys, obstacles, successes.

3. **Observations-** As well as taking numerous photographs of specific displays, furniture layouts, innovative storage ideas, timetables / groupings and break out areas, I watched the students "learning", either in a group, on individual or paired tasks and noted the variety of furniture available for them to choose to use for their specific tasks. Interestingly students are similar in every school. I could see the really focused students, the students who needed refocusing from time to time and the students that are tomorrow's leaders. Having this opportunity was special and a highlight of the visits. I observed how the teachers and teacher aides were teaching, facilitating, encouraging and supporting, either in larger or smaller groups or with individuals in a break out space. This certainly reflected the flexible nature of these innovative spaces.

4. **Researching-** Visiting Ministry websites and websites recommended by Principals. I, particularly acknowledge Tony Grey from Te Kowhai School and Wendy Rundle from Stonefields who generously shared valuable websites and readings. As I read the various articles and watched the video clips, I made notes of which would be pertinent for my board, my community or more detailed and specific to use as a basis for professional conversations and learning with my teachers.

5. **Attending Courses / Workshops-**

- Learning Environments- One Day Symposium held at Auckland University of Technology  
Associate Professor Wesley Imms- Graduate School of Education University of Melbourne  
DP Stonefields- Chris Bradbeer            AUT- Leon Benade            Cognition Education- Jacque Allen
- Differentiating & Individualising the Curriculum- The Pirozzo Model – Ralph Pirozzo
- The Art of Inquiry Teaching- Supporting Students as Inquirers - Kath Murdoch

## FINDINGS

### Terminology

The term *Modern Learning environment* (MLE) has been superseded with *Innovative Learning Environment* (ILE). MLEs focused on the physical aspects of the environment whereas ILEs broadens the thinking to include pedagogical and social elements within the new, modern space.

On their website ( <http://mle.education.govt.nz> ) the Ministry described the reason

- for promoting modern learning environments –

*“ The majority of buildings in NZ were built between the 1950s and 1970s. Since then the teaching practices and standards of learning have changed significantly. New technologies and building materials allow for new and vibrant and connected learning spaces. All students deserve to be taught in these innovative learning environments and benefit from these new teaching methods.”*

- behind changing the term MLE to ILE-

*“ A learning environment may be understood to be the complete physical, social and pedagogical context in which learning is intended to occur. An innovative environment is one that is capable of evolving and adapting as educational practices evolve and change- thus remaining future focused. ....”Innovative learning environment” has greater international recognition and the Ministry of Education is migrating to this term consistent with both international usage and growing discomfort in new Zealand with the term MLE.”*

The term Flexible Learning space has also evolved. It embodies the notion that the environment is not static.

*“A flexible learning space (FLS) can be easily configured and used in a number of different ways to support and enable a range of teaching and learning approaches on any given day or at any time of the day. They can adapt to a broader range of teaching and learning practices and groupings as a school’s education practices evolve over time. The FLS has the right acoustics, lighting, technology, heating and air quality to support learning.”* CORE Education

Mark Osborne from Core Education states-

*“Most of New Zealand’s school buildings were built in a time when direct instruction was considered the only pedagogy that resulted in effective learning. “Factory-style’ learning (where all students learn the same things, at the same time, in lock-step fashion) has largely disappeared from our classes. However the actual classrooms largely remain as they were originally designed, and still retain the suggestion of factory-style learning.”*

### Characteristics

*“ILE are often centred around a student ‘home base’ where a lot of the teaching and learning occurs, and these bases provide access to a variety of other learning spaces. Not all classes will need all spaces all of the time, but students should have access to them should the need arise. “*

Mark Osbourne CORE Education

*“Breakout spaces can be built in with walls and glazing, or can be defined by using furniture. When they are built in, they should be attached to a learning area but separated from the main learning space with glazing or sliding glass doors so that the teacher in the main learning space can passively supervise the space.”* Ministry of Education

Breakout spaces are shared spaces between learning spaces that encourage independent learning, small group work, co-operative work by teachers and students across classes.

**ILE** offer students and teachers much more:

- **Flexibility:** the ability to combine two classes into one for team-teaching, split a class into small groups and spread them over a wider area or combine different classes studying complementary learning areas.
- **Openness:** modern learning environments traditionally have fewer walls, more glass and often use the idea of a learning common (or hub) which is a central teaching and learning space that can be shared by several classes. They provide opportunities to observe and learn from the teaching of others and be observed in return. They also provide access to what students in other learning areas and level are learning, so that teaching and learning can be complemented and enhanced.
- **Access to resources** (including technology): typically a learning common is surrounded by breakout spaces allowing a range of different activities, such as reading, group work, project space, wet areas, reflection, and presenting. There is often a mixture of wireless and wired technology offering access as and when students need it, within the flow of their learning.
- **Support for Strengths-based teaching** Teachers and students working in an open, flexible learning environment can share inquiries, devise interventions collaboratively, and reflect based on both self and peer observations, thus leading to a more robust, continuously improving community of practice.

The MOE advise it is important that learning spaces are healthy and comfortable for students to spend many hours inside. The most important elements of the environment to consider are air quality, heating, lighting and acoustics. Because these elements are so important, the MOE has developed the Designing Quality Learning Spaces (DQLS) guidelines in partnership with the Building Research Association of New Zealand (BRANZ).

The DQLS guidelines set out the Ministry's standards that learning spaces must meet when they are being upgraded, and advice on how to achieve these.

- **Good acoustics** are important – they help students correctly interpret what a teacher is saying, and stop students from tuning out which can make teaching easier. Good quality acoustics in traditionally noisy environments can contribute to a calmer learning environment. Sudden noise should be kept to a minimum.
- **Lighting-** Natural light is better for students. It is important to be able to control lighting. Windows should stop views from being a distraction, minimise glare and heat from the sun, and keep the light from creating strong contrasts in the learning space.
- **Heating-** Being able to control heating to suit the user is important. Heating sources must be safe for students
- **Ventilation-** Flexible learning spaces must have good air quality. This lowers the chance of causing health difficulties.

**Furniture, fittings, and equipment** have the potential to improve student outcomes. Schools must design flexible learning spaces that work for everyone. Students have different preferences for where to sit and how they will do their learning. Ideally they should have input into the furniture provided. By choosing appropriate furniture, you can create a more efficient flexible learning space. For example, you can divide a learning space into different areas using tables, couches and chairs. Companies supplying furniture to schools have an enormous range of furniture to choose from.

## Why Innovative Learning environments?

Flexible learning spaces in schools- MOE website

*" Most schools were built between the 1950s and 1970s. The way that teachers teach and students learn has been developing since then.*

*We want all schools to have vibrant, well connected, physical environments that encourage and support many different types of learning. This flexibility helps teachers equip our kids with the skills and knowledge they need.*

*The evidence shows that the physical design of a space can have an impact on student outcomes. It also shows that physical design and teaching practise need to be closely aligned."*

By 2021 the MOE plans for all classrooms to be modernised.

John Hattie supports innovative learning environments. In his work- Visible Learning for Teachers\_(Hattie, 2008) he shares-

*" We now have a much better idea of how learning occurs. My own thought is that the crux of Innovative Learning Environments are that they provide our teachers greater opportunities to use the pedagogies that really make a difference. In addition to learning what students know, teachers also need to learn how their students learn as well (this is enhanced within collaborative teams)"*

Key Point- there is great power from teachers learning from each other. When teachers begin to collaborate and develop common understandings...they all begin to move in the right direction."

These on line snippets support Innovative learning environments and could be used with staff and communities for further information.

1. Tony Grey, Principal of Te Kowhai school's website <http://thequohaslostitsstaus.weebly.com>

My Thoughts- ILE Screencast " What's all this stuff about MLE's?"

Key points-

- No evidence that single cell classroom teaching is better
- Old system may still work but the new ways are better
- It compares yesterday's telephones, cars and practices at the dentist, hair salon, hospital with those of today.

Tony shares-

*"The world we live in is constantly changing. As educators we must embrace these changes and ensure that education meets the needs of today's students so they can thrive in the world in which they will live. These students need to be not only prepared for the future, but possess the skills and attributes to MAKE the future! If we hope just to tell students what we know in order for them to be able to do what we do, we have seriously misunderstood the task required of education in the twenty-first century.*

*We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist . . . using technologies that haven't been invented . . . in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."*

2. *Flexible Classrooms: Providing the Learning Environment That Kids Need-* you tube clip from Albemarie County Public School Charlottesville VA ( George Lucas Education Foundation- Edutopia)

Key Points-

- Teacher with vision
- Flexible spaces to suit individual student needs and optimum working environment
- Engaged, happy, conversant students

## What learning looks like in an ILE

*"The focus of innovative learning spaces is never about the building. It's what the building enables users to do. ... If we believe that everyone brings different prior knowledge to a topic and no two people learn the same thing in the same way at the same speed, then it doesn't make sense to have a classroom set up with everyone facing the front doing the same thing at the same time."*

Ministry of Education

Mark Osborne shares in his paper "Modern Learning Environments" - Core Education white paper that "Quality learning is a combination of the following elements-

- **Personalised learning:** no two individuals learn in the same way, nor do they bring the same prior knowledge to a learning experience. The way we learn is as unique as our fingerprint.
- **Socially constructed learning** (Johnson, 1981): the collaboration, peer-tutoring and reciprocal teaching that occurs when students work together results in a deeper understanding of the material being covered.
- **Differentiated learning** (Bloom, 1974): the prior knowledge we all bring to a task means individuals require different levels of challenge, pace, content and context.
- **Learning that is initiated by students** themselves (Ramey & Ramey, 2004): typically when a student initiates a learning experience or exploration, they learn more.
- **Learning that is connected to the physical world and authentic contexts:** children learn through interaction with others and the physical world (Malone & Tranter, 2003). Learning about pond ecosystems is more powerful if students visit a pond in addition to learning about them in a classroom or textbook."

Effective Innovative Learning Environments provide spaces to incorporate these elements, thus meeting the needs / styles of each learner.

- Group teaching areas- flexible furniture arrangements can accommodate groups of varying sizes
- Peer to peer environments for informal learning
- Clusters/ collaborative spaces for student group work
- Quiet spaces for individual work

## Karen Boyes Blog: Modern Learning Environments – the underlying philosophy to success

Karen outlines five considerations that are vital to address for success in the ILE journey.

1. Be clear on your underlying philosophy of learning.
2. Create a safe environment by redefining mistakes and failure
3. Teach students to take ownership
4. Ensure students know the learning process
5. Celebrate the learning – not the end result

## Innovative Learning Principles

- Make learning and engagement central
- Ensure that learning is social and often collaborative
- Develop learner independence- Student Licenses- Ngtea School
- Be highly attuned to learner motivation and emotions
- Be acutely sensitive to individual differences
- Be demanding for each learner without excessive overload
- Refer "The Learning Pit"
- Use assessments consistent with learning aims with strong emphasis on formative feedback
- Promote connectedness across activities and subjects in and out of school
- Teachers working collaboratively



## **Collaboration- Key to Effective Innovative Learning**

Collaborative spaces do not lead to collaborative practice. Collaborative practice is a '*people thing*'. It's the people that make collaborative spaces work, or not.

Starting within the classroom the basic building block is instructional practice linked to student achievement. Instruction and assessment operate as a two-way street, one informing the other. Personalization, i.e., individual needs of students becomes the focus.

The advantages of collaborative teaching -

- Teachers utilise their strengths and passions
- Students get the best bits from each teacher- building a super teacher
- Students can be grouped more effectively for their learning needs
- Students can receive extension / support
- Students get to see and hear positive interaction between teachers, thinking processes articulated, adults and children having fun with learning, modelling collaboration
- More professionals to diagnose student needs, discuss / share solutions
- Students have a variety of teachers to connect with and build relationships.
- There are extra eyes to monitor / support students
- Students are more likely to be engaged in their learning which decreases behaviour issues
- Multiple teachers offer multiple perspectives
- Continuity is maintained if a teacher is away- the reliever slots in to the existing programme
- Teachers learn from each other. For teachers to improve their practice they learn best from other teachers provided that these teachers are also working on improvement. These exchanges are thus purposeful, and based on evidence.

## **Core Education Learning environments to support teacher learning**

*"Open and flexible spaces also create more collaborative communities of practice for teachers.*

*Having access to the teaching practice of your colleagues to model and to be modelled to, supports the development of effective teaching practice far more than teaching in an isolated, private space.*

*This 'de-privatisation of practice' means that honest exploration of teacher strengths and weaknesses can take place in an open and supportive environment.*

*Beginning and provisionally-registered teachers have far more support around them in open learning spaces. Their progress can be monitored, supported and celebrated by their more experienced colleagues and ongoing mentoring is easy to put in place because they have seasoned professionals to the left and the right of them.*

*Modern learning spaces can support teaching as inquiry better than single-cell classrooms. Working in an open, flexible learning environment where inquiries are shared, interventions devised collaboratively and reflections based on both self and peer observations, leads to a more robust, continuously improving community of practice."*

## **Learning is the Work Michael Fullan May 2011 Unpublished paper**

*" Learning on the job, day after day, is the work. My colleague Richard Elmore (2004) elaborates: "The problem [is that] there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and substantial learning about their practice... observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in schools confronting similar problems of practice".*

*Fortunately there is new work underway that is building new collaborative cultures within and across schools in order to build the individual and especially collective capacity to improve instruction linked to student needs and achievement.*

*The research has been clear and consistent for over 30 years—collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other, and are well led and supported by school principals result in better learning for students."*

Tony Grey, Principal of Te Kowhai school's website <http://thequohaslostitsstaus.weebly.com>

Includes useful podcasts about collaboration- developing collective teacher efficacy

1. Collaborative Teaching Advantages <https://youtu.be/YQG638o97Ko>
2. Collaborative Teaching Advantages - Part Two <https://youtu.be/HP14A2gOsm8>
3. Notion of collective teacher efficacy <https://youtu.be/FUfEWZGLFZE>

Jacque Allen recommends the following for a successful learning environment.

Innovative Learning- pedagogy, practice, environment- Jacque Allen

(Notes from One Day Symposium held at Auckland University of Technology- 14 February 2017)

- Create a collaborative environment that supports the introduction of ILE.
- Establish a protocol for working collaboratively.
- Build relationships
- Think and talk 'Our students, not 'My students'.
- Involve students in the planning, environment layout
- Create an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment.
- Plan time for all involved to visit other schools.
- Be adaptable. Have enthusiasm for the ability to change course when necessary.
- Maintain positivity.
- Be flexible. Be adaptable. Be open to all possibilities.
- Re-think learning. Re-think teaching. Embrace new ways of planning and evaluating collaboratively- tools and approaches.
- Plan for strengths based teaching.
- Celebrate success.
- Work consistently on communication between team members.
- Build networks with your parents / whanau. Be culturally responsive.
- Build *Teaching as Inquiry* practice. Share inquiries.
- Collaborative conversations around sharing assessment data.
- Plan flexible learning approaches. e.g. Flexible grouping. Self selected grouping.
- Ensure Learner Agency - student voice, ownership & reflection on their learning.
- Student Led Conferencing - students reporting their own learning. Reporting in new ways.
- Provide technology to support learning

### **Summary- Why Innovative Learning Environments?**

- It personalizes the learning catering for individual learners' needs
- It develops student agency as learning increasingly becomes self-directed
- Students know about their learning and are able to identify gaps and next learning steps
- It encourages collaboration and sharing
- It promotes higher levels of student engagement
- It is connected to the modern world, utilising technologies to enhance / extend learning
- Learners have choice ensuring learning is authentic
- Spaces can be re arranged to suit a variety of learning activities / learning styles and preferences
- Opportunity to build relationships with several teachers
- Learning discussions between teachers, students and teacher- student



### **Concluding Thoughts- Where to from here?**

It is clear that the success of launching into an innovative learning style in our new learning space is dependent upon a shared vision and understanding. It will not be my new space, it will be our new space.

My research and networking with colleagues- Principals and Teachers leading and working in these innovative spaces has helped clarify my thoughts and deepen my understanding of what ILEs are about. I have gathered a repertoire of tools / research to share with my teachers, BOT and community as we continue our journey towards an effective, successful learning environment where our students enjoy learning and meet success.

As with all inquiries, whilst seeking answers to one question, more questions emerge. ILE is a changing education landscape. We will need to 'learn, unlearn and relearn' in our journey towards being an innovative learning environment. We will need to take time to reflect, to revisit our vision, support and mentor our teachers and learners on this journey. We will build capability and confidence through valuing the collective voice of all. ILE is a continuum of collaboration. The evidence of success will be student achievement.

### **Acknowledgements**

- The Ministry of Education for giving me the opportunity for Sabbatical Leave
- Pukekawa School Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical application and subsequent leave
- Mrs Karen Kanon, my Senior Teacher, for willingly and ably stepping into the Principal role
- The Principals and teachers of the schools I visited to observe, discuss, learn.

In particular,

- Tony Grey from Te Kowhai School- his website of ILE resources has provided a wealth of readings and ideas.
- Neil Fraser from Ngtea School- I visited several times and each time learnt more and saw different perspectives
- Chris Bradbeer from Stonefields- I attended a workshop at the One Day Symposium and then saw the theory in action at his school.

### **References**

- *Learning Environments- One Day Symposium* held at Auckland University of Technology
  - \*Associate Professor Wesley Imms- Graduate School of Education University of Melbourne
  - \*DP Stonefields- Chris Bradbeer
- Ministry of Education website ( <http://mle.education.govt.nz> ) plus DQLS guidelines
- TKI Enabling E learning Technologies
- *Flexible Classrooms: Providing the Learning Environment That Kids Need*- you tube clip from Albemarle County Public School Charlottesville VA ( George Lucas Education Foundation- Edutopia)
- *Learning is the Work* Michael Fullan May 2011 Unpublished paper
- Tony Grey, Principal of Te Kowhai school's website <http://thequohaslostitsstaus.weebly.com>
- *Innovative Learning- pedagogy, practice, environment*- Jacquie Allen Cognition Education (One Day Symposium held at Auckland University of Technology- 14 February 2017)
- OECD Report- *Innovative Learning Environments*
- Core Education- Mark Osborne *Modern Learning Environments*
- John Hattie- *Visible Learning for Teachers*
- Karen Boyes Blog- Modern Learning Environments- *The Underlying Philosophy to Success*