

Principal Sabbatical Report

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Executive Summary

The opportunity to participate in a principal sabbatical has allowed me to stand back and reflect on our school's approach to inquiry and personalised learning and compare this to what is happening in a number of schools in greater Auckland. I have also been able to meet a number of dedicated leaders, witness a range of knowledge, observe sound imbedded practice and spend time with my family.

Although many schools appear to have implemented some form of inquiry or personalised learning approach and can talk the language and theory of these approaches, it was obvious in some schools that this is distanced from what is actually happening in the classrooms'. My experience is that many of us have started down the road but have some distance to travel before we can truthfully say we have fully personalised learning in our schools.

To Involve the parent community is a struggle especially for some of the lower decile schools and some now feel it wastes a lot of time with little or no result.

Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical was to visit schools in order to review and research the practical strategies and practices that are currently in place to support and enhance learning. The questions lean towards how schools are implementing personalised learning or inquiry learning and focus on the major stakeholders that being; students, staff and community. Part of this was to see how these programmes promote high standards in order to raise student achievement.

Defining Personalised Learning

'Personalising learning involves thinking about knowledge as an active process. Students get to be informed, active participants in their own learning, they contribute to decisions about how learning works best for them, and they have a much better understanding of how they are progressing.'

(Ministry of Education, 2006)

In 2006, the Ministry of Education published *Let's Talk About: Personalising Learning* from which this extract comes from:

What will personalising learning look like?

By personalising learning we are involving all of the New Zealand's education system in ensuring that our children and young people are successful.

Children and young people will know how to take control of their own learning.

Parents and family/whanau will be partners in their children's learning.

Teachers will have high expectations of every student, know how they learn and adjust their teaching to meet students' learning needs.

Early childhood services will have a clear vision and the capability to achieve it.

The Ministry of Education will know how to best build capacity to support learning for all.

Defining Inquiry Learning

A Definition of Inquiry

Defining inquiry-based education is obviously complicated as it covers various approaches from constructivism, problem-solving approaches, project-based learning, and many other variations. One of the core elements that comes through is that inquiry is that it should be learner-centered.

"For students, this method of learning ends the listen-to-learn paradigm of the classroom and gives them a real and authentic goal challenges to overcome. For the teacher, inquiry-based education ends their paradigm of talking to teach and recasts them in the role of a colleague and mentor engaged in the same quest as the other younger learners around."

http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/Cyberia/DVE/FusionDVE/html/inquiry_based_education.html

"Inquiry is an approach to learning that involves a process of exploring the natural or material world, that leads to asking questions and making discoveries in the search for new understandings."

<http://www.exploratorium.edu/IFI/resources/inquirydesc.html>

Combining Inquiry and Personalisation Approaches

Below is a clear definition from Pam Hook and Julie Mills from 'Hooked on Thinking' using solo taxonomy as the glue to make the approach work successfully.

'Personalisation enables students to see themselves involved in the planning and delivery of their learning and development.'

The learner may well be placed at the centre, but for the "learner" to be thoughtfully involved in "personalisation" there must be more than "institutional provision and procedure".

Lifelong learning requires the learner to think about the strengths and weaknesses of their own thinking when they are learning. It requires the learner to have an understanding of:

- 1. The learning process (SOLO Taxonomy)*
- 2. Learning intentions and learning outcomes (SOLO coded learning experiences)*
- 3. Self Assessment of their place in the learning process (SOLO coded self assessment rubrics)*
- 4. The language of learning/ instruction used in schools (SOLO coded)*
- 5. Interventions (Thinking and ICTs) that enhance the conditions of value when learning (SOLO coded interventions)'*

For more information go to <http://www.hooked-on-thinking.com/>

Summary of definitions

It would be reasonable to suggest that for the purpose of this report that personalised learning and inquiry learning are essentially the same in regards to the learner being more involved in all aspects of their learning.

Methodology

1. Contact a range of sizes and deciles, of schools in the Greater Auckland Area.
2. Ring the schools and follow-up with a letter of introduction, key questions and visit.
3. Visit schools and interview key players.
4. Collate information and write up findings.
5. Share findings

Findings

I have grouped many of the answers together as they were essentially saying or explaining the same concept or practice.

How do they enable students to be involved in the planning and delivery of their learning and development to ensure they are informed and active participants in their own learning?

- Most schools used the inquiry model as an example and generally the context for the study by the students is set by the teaching staff.
- Schools make sure the strands in the current curriculum are covered.
- Quests were also given as an example of an interactive ICT approach
- Making sure the students know what they are learning and why. The acronym WALT (we are learning to..) is widely used
- Students are able to regularly self assess with portfolio being quoted as an example.
- Pre/post tests
- Ignorance logs were used in one school (knowing what we don't know)
- Peer assessment

How do they raise student achievement in literacy and numeracy in line with school charter goals and strategic plan?

- Involvement in Ministry of Education Professional development Contracts ie: Literacy
- Compare data internally and externally
- Targeted PD and funding allocations for resources
- Involving parents in Home / School Partnerships
- Developing learning communities
- Effective data gathering and planning forward

When developing thinking and learning strategies across the curriculum what strategies or planning processes have been put in place to strengthen the individual schools learning community through interschool collaboration and home school partnership?

- Involvement in cluster and individual school contracts such as Gifted and Talented, ICT, Literacy
- Sharing skills and professional development within the local cluster. This gives insights into what other schools are doing.
- Comparing data and ideas.
- Home school partnership contract
- Parent evening curriculum sessions
- Syndicate planning
- Limited school wide planning
- With new curriculum there are more schools exploring possibilities

Are there effective practical strategies in place to ensure the coaching and mentoring of teachers by teachers in order to share effective practice across cluster?

- Cluster professional development contracts
- Release time organised for teachers
- Targeted syndicate professional development
- Inservice for lead teachers so they can train other teachers- peer training
- Higher budget allocations to reflect needs of schools.

How does this improve the pedagogical knowledge of teachers to provide students with the understanding and planning for their own learning and/or help the teachers make evidence based decisions using assessment (AsTTle, STAR, PAT etc) to inform teaching and learning?

- Always useful for teachers to see other schools and what and how improvement is happening.
- Data that is being collected is not just for collecting data to fill up roll books but carefully analysed and used to improve teaching learning opportunities.
- Modelling of sound teaching practices now regularly takes place in several schools.
- Student achievement is measured against national norms and individual students that are underachieving are identified and appropriate programmes are put in place.
- Teachers are moderating student work to ensure greater consistency in assessment.
- Clear data encourages the setting of higher standards for both teachers and students
- Greater awareness of students needs and progress thus developing pride and success.
- Accurate data is vital in setting the strategic focus of teaching and learning

What practical ways are schools combining the above when working in partnership with the community?

- Parents helping with groups
- Home school partnerships
- Informing parents of what is going on in the school
- Student/parent/ teacher interviews
- Parent sessions – poor turnouts in some cases
- Talking to parents informally in playground/carpark
- Portfolios that are parent friendly and easy to follow with reports that clearly show progress of their child and next steps

Implications

It appears from this investigation that whilst there appears to be a lot of progress in terms of pedagogy, use of data, and teaching practice we are still a way off students taking control of their own learning.

I have visited schools that are trying hard to involve parents and family/whanau to be partners in their children's learning but many schools are struggling in this area.

Generally from what I saw and witnessed, I noted that the teachers and the senior management have high expectations of the students' in their school, are keen to know how students learn and willingly adjust their teaching and school structure to meet students' learning needs.

References

Hooked on Thinking. Pam Hook and Julie Mills

<http://www.hooked-on-thinking.com/>

Leadbeater, C. (2004) *Learning about personalisation: How can we put the learner at the heart of the education system?* Department of Education and Skills, Innovation Unit, in partnership with DEMOS, NCSL. Nottingham. UK.

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