Primary School Leadership in Modern Learning Environments.
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Purpose:
The purpose of this sabbatical study was to build a greater understanding of leadership in Modern Learning Environments (MLEs). This was achieved through: - carrying out a literature review; - and visiting seven schools with MLEs and interviewing their leaders to discover their experiences and thinking on leadership in their MLE.

Findings:
The findings of this sabbatical will be written in two parts: -
1) Literature Review and References
2) A Summary of Ideas and Experiences Identified by Seven New Zealand Primary School Principals When Focusing on Their Leadership in a Modern Learning Environment (MLE) School.

Background and Rationale:
I have just had the privilege of leading Whitiora School through a process of becoming a MLE school with the total "Building Replacement" of our previous six classrooms with two MLE Learning Centres in a 7 month building programme. We shifted into our new MLE in February 2013 and since then we have all been especially busy first preparing and then making the new place ours. My full credit goes to our teachers who have made a huge effort in the adjusting of their thinking, ways of working together, and using their learning environment for children's learning benefit. In the short 6 months since shifting into our MLE it has been hugely encouraging to see some exciting developments in student learning patterns which we are confident will result in positive shifts in student learning outcomes.

As an experienced principal I realise that there are also adjustments to be made on the side of leadership if teachers are to be most effectively supported and empowered to make best use of their learning environments and for students to be able to take the fullest advantage of everything their MLE offers. With the on-going demands of leading a school it is not easy to set aside time to focus on MLEs and their leadership. To have

extensive Sabbatical time focused professional reading and reflection, as well as the privilege of visiting a number of schools within a relatively short space of time and to have quality discussions with MLE Principal colleagues will be hugely beneficial to me personally, and I hope also our leadership team as a whole at Whitiora School, and others in a similar position – including those who have participated in discussions in the course of this sabbatical.

Part One:
Literature Review.
Primary School Leadership in Modern Learning Environment (MLE) Schools.

Introduction
Leadership is leadership, no matter the size or shape of the school, and the primary focus is always on maximising student achievement, so one would expect many aspects of Modern Learning Environment School leadership to be the same as leadership in other schools. However, Modern Learning Environments (MLEs) do magnify some critical aspects of leadership and open up challenges and opportunities for leaders that are different from other school environments. This literature review will explore what is identified about school leadership, with a particular focus on leadership of Modern Learning Environments.

General statement of school leadership.
School leadership for improved student learning outcomes is about change. Re-culturing for improving student learning involves the culture and practices of teachers and leaders. Effective school leadership ensures the culture is "safe and well organised, allowing teachers to focus on their teaching, and students on their learning" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 18). The centrality of teacher and leader contribution is readily endorsed: "excellent teaching is the single most powerful influence on achievement" (Hattie, 2002, p. 8); and "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins, 2006, p. 4).

Effective principals can only spend a limited time in the classroom directly influencing student learning. A principal's main influence on school direction and learning is indirect and mediated through impact on culture (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 73, 76). This is achieved by focusing on identifying, clarifying, modifying and transforming the core culture (Stewart, 2000, p. 54), which includes, but is not limited to, staff motivation, commitment and perceived working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 10-11). School leaders also foster inclusive values, establish clear expectations, and model desired behaviours. It is their task to create a collaborative environment that supports teachers and encourages collective responsibility for learners and a growing ability and responsiveness to meet student needs (Ministry of Education, 2012). "Effective leadership builds the pedagogical, administrative and cultural conditions necessary for successful learning and teaching" (Ministry of Education 2008, p.7).

As well as leaders identifying the current culture, there is the need for critical thinking and acting as a filter (Stewart, 2002, p. 1; Stoll et al., 2003, p. 107) in order to promote what

is worthy and know what to oppose or subvert. Paying attention to competing agendas, the effective leader faces the challenge not to lose sight of the few key priorities for improving student learning (Levin & Fullan, 2008, p. 298), to retain the big picture, and to then communicate it along with the challenges and progress (Levin & Fullan, 2008, p. 298) helping stakeholders to view the school in a holistic way (Stoll et al., 2003, p. 104). The School Vision can be seen as an expression of this holistic view of the school and is the touch stone against which leadership decisions are determined. Blackmore, Bateman, Cloonan, Dixon, Loughlin, O'Mara, & Senior (2010, p.42) identified leadership as a critical element in each of twelve Innovative Learning Environments – ILEs (or MLEs) – in particular Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) identified significant roles of providing vision, resources and conditions of work that enhance student / teacher interaction.

Vivian Robinson (2007) identified pedagogical leadership as the most likely form of leadership to impact student learning outcomes. The 5 dimensions of pedagogical leadership are each undergirded by the need for positive relationship skills and the interrelationship of each dimension with the others. The dimensions are:
1. Establishing and communicating learning goals and expectations
2. Strategic resourcing allocated to priority teaching goals
3. Direct involvement by leaders in planning, coordinating and evaluating curriculum and teaching
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment to that teachers and students can focus on teaching and learning

Leadership of Modern Learning Environments (MLEs)
Blackmore, etal (2010, p.43) in carrying out a detailed and significant study, as far as this review is concerned, of twelve Innovative Learning Environments – ILEs (or MLEs) and looking in part at leadership, confirmed Robinson's (2007) five dimension list, but indicated that neighbourhood, policy and institutional environments were also key factors. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, (2004) with a focus on distributed leadership confirms this view, noting that schools "need leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of an 'ideal' set of practices" (p.10) and that successful leadership "depends on how well the leaders interact with the larger social and organisational context in which they find themselves" (p.23).

The decision for a school to move to becoming a MLE is a complex one. Blackmore etal (2010, p.53) note that in each of their twelve school studied, the focus of redesign into an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE or MLE) was the aim to improve student learning - and that this drive was the "warrant" for instituting change and developing new ways of organising and practicing teaching and learning. Three new trends in learning are: Collaborative, Tech-powered, and Blended learning in which teacher roles and relationships are changing and class time is being used in new ways (Barseghian, 2011). Osborne (2013a, p.3) notes quality learning is a combination of the following: personalised, socially constructed, differentiated, and linked to the physical world and authentic contexts. Many MLEs are supporting teachers and students in these trends by promoting and supporting a range of pedagogies (Osborne, 2013a, p.4).

Modern Learning Environment (MLE) flexibility
Just as teachers need to be flexible, so equally the MLE needs to be flexible (Fisher, 2005b, p.162 citing Dudeck, 2000). Flexibility is identified as one of the key principles of a MLE (Curtain, 2012). Osborne (2013b, Blog page) asks: If we were to design physical

learning environments that matched and supported what we know about learning, what features would they have? - and concludes: Flexibility, Openness, and Access to resources (both physical and digital). The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2004) identify design flexibility, and adaptability in terms of the ability to control the layout and respond to needs in the future as key criteria of the MLE. In reviewing an early pilot of MLE studio development in five New Zealand schools, the Ministry of Education (2012) noted that the intention was that the studios "would allow a variety of teaching and learning styles, furniture arrangements and locations from which to teach and learn" (p.4) and that the review identified that the studio concept encourages team teaching (p.7) and allowed a flexibility not available in standard classrooms (p.18). There are very positive views of the MLE studios from across the full range of stakeholders, however, it is significant that Principals and teachers involved were also of the realistic view that "the learning benefits that accrue from the concept are difficult to assess, but that the range of spaces offer opportunities that support enhanced education outcomes" (p.6).

Flexibility is not the only feature of the MLE that leaders need to consider. Blackmore etal (2010, p.53) identified seven practices that require attention in redesign processes leading to ILE Innovative Learning Environments: Spatial, Temporal, Cultural, Structural, Communication, Social, and Semiotic. While there are warnings against 'Architectural determinism' taking over plans for renewal and limiting local variation and ownership (Higgins etal, 2005, p.6), a good consultative process is seen as the way to increase ownership and engagement by the community, teachers and students in the project, and ultimately the success of the development and having impact on behaviour, well-being and achievement (Bradbeer 2012, Blog page; Higgins etal 2005, p.6).

<u>MLEs are for students – we need to listen to them</u>
In addition to the perceptions of designers, educators and parents, leaders need to seriously consider student voice in order to fine tune a learning environment (Könings, Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, 2005, p.656-657). In Finland, Kangas (2010, p206) cites Valijarvi, & Sahlberg's (2008) view that "educational excellence is about more than statistical averages of student achievement: it also requires that students *enjoy* learning in school". Kangas (2010, p206) goes on to summarise student identified views on the ideal school learning environment under headings of: educational and cultural well-being; socio-emotional well-being and the joy of learning; physical well-being and environmental comfort; and fantasy and innovation. Variety in learning environments - formal and informal, physical and digital, is seen as important and resulting in providing not only teachers with greater opportunity for collaboration resulting in greater variety of learning experiences, but also providing students with choices in their learning (Alberta Government, nd).

<u>Supportive approaches of PLD for strengthening a MLE</u>
MLEs are not only about buildings they are also about people and in particular about creating, through reform, learning communities where people are empowered to be the best they can be in their practice. Blackmore etal (2010, p.41-46) identify a need for leaders to be aware that different approaches to reform have implications for how professional learning is undertaken. Strategies may vary and include differing amounts of organic evolution, external consultants, evidence driven analysis of data, and provocations to challenge teachers to change practice. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) identified three forms of knowledge that teachers have to negotiate with the pedagogical needs of students: Knowledge *for* practice – subject matter and content, pedagogical repertoire and research (p.252); Knowledge *in* practice – that expressed in practice, reflections and narratives (p.262); and Knowledge *of* practice relationship between

knowledge and theoretical aspects (p.272). Blackmore cites McLaughlin and Talbert (2006, p.77-78) that leaders need to be aware of three principles when combining approaches to teacher professional learning: Complimentarily - between classroom coaching and teamwork; collaborative teamwork and off site activities; Interdependence – which encourages building of knowledge for practice as a professional community; and Synergy – between classroom professional relationships, learning communities and system wide professional development (p.43).

Blackmore etal (2010, p.43) identified that in the ILEs (MLEs) there was a strong trend towards developing knowledge of practice and growing teacher leadership. And that common practice in the MLEs was for teachers to provide their own professional learning through presentations to each other in designated staff meeting times (p.46). Investment in teachers is a critical aspect of a MLE. MLE school leaders have to go beyond the standard approach of simply providing professional learning opportunities for growth. The challenge for school leadership is to 'create synergistic effects' (Silins and Mulford, 2010, p.19) through its decisions. Leadership ability to facilitate "teacher capacity to undertake *serial redesign* through visits to other schools/sites to investigate ideas" was seen as critical to the success of ILEs (MLEs) (Blackmore etal, 2010, p.46).

Different types of team teaching and collaboration
The openness and flexibility of the MLE space and the multi-age level of classes encourages and make a central feature of collaborative team teaching. The collaboration requires significant team planning, coordination, and even synchronicity of learning activities because of the coordinated interdependence of shared flexible learning spaces (Blackmmore etal, 2010, p.45, 52).). Whilst spaces offer potential for collaboration it isn't always harnessed – a big factor in the failure of the 1970s open-plan schools (Bradbeer, 2011d, Blog page).

Team teaching and collaboration can both take on different forms. While collaborative team teaching is the distribution of responsibility – planning, instruction and evaluation among a team of colleagues - leadership and teachers need to be aware of the different models of co-teaching: *Supportive teaching* – where one takes the lead in teaching and the other floats in support; *Parallel teaching* – when two or more work with different groups of students at the same time in different parts of the room; *Complimentary teaching* – when co-teachers do something to enhance the teaching of their colleague; *Team teaching* – when two or more teachers take equal share of responsibility, leadership and accountability in all the aspects of teaching and support tasks (York-Barr, Ghere, Sommemess, 2007). Bradbeer (2011d, Blog page) comments that "as teachers gain confidence in a collaborative situation they will find situations where each of the four models are useful and appropriate".

As well as different models of team teaching, Bradbeer (2013c, Blog page) notes that research has also identified different stages of collaboration: *Coordination* – one taking the lead and reporting back; *Cooperation* – dividing up a task and then combining when completed; *Collaboration* – work is done together. Chris Bradbeer also notes that teaching, teams may shift between collaboration, cooperation, and coordination as they work together, and that perhaps "when approaching a particular task teaching teams need to be mindful of the approach that is most appropriate" (2013c, Blog page). Awareness and acceptance by leaders and teachers of the different models of team teaching and collaboration may take some of the pressure off MLE teaching and empower most efficient and best practice to occur.

<u>Professional support for developing effective MLE teams</u>
MLEs with their open and flexible spaces "create more collaborative communities of practice for teachers … (and) … the 'de-privatisation of practice' means that honest exploration of teacher strengths and weaknesses can take place in an open and supportive environment" (Osborne, 2013a, p.5). When your practice is so visible in front of colleagues there also a healthy sense of accountability (Bradbeer, 2013a, Blog page). Leaders need to be aware that such a shift to "public" teaching can, for some teachers, cause feelings of insecurity (Bradbeer, 2011c, Blog page). Leaders need to be awareness of staff wellbeing and if necessary ensure emotional support is available (Blackmore etal, 2010, p.39). York-Barr etal (2007, p.329) further state that "Problems and conflicts are inevitable in the complex reality of instructional collaboration …(however) as teachers worked closely together, trust increased, which in turn fostered greater collaboration and more in-depth reflective practice" (p.329). Given the need for effective interdependence, good communication is essential in developing effective MLEs – both within the teacher teams, between teams, and also leaders with teams (Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner, & McCaughey, 2005, p.8). Leaders most likely will need to support their teachers through these challenges, providing training and coaching to support high levels of communication and relational skills and so the building of relational trust to the point of establishing confidence in both colleagues and new environment.

Leadership can further support teachers in what they choose to focus on and how they develop student progress. Silins and Mulford (2010, p.73,88-89) identify focusing on school capacity to respond to learning needs, effective processes of evaluation and accountability, teacher values and beliefs and student empowerment and social skills are important. Reviewing evidence and generating effective feedback based upon critical reflection is vital in MLEs (Blackmore, 2010, p.46) for both leadership and teaching teams. The openness and de-privatisation of practice of the MLE bring many positive benefits for teachers and leaders alike in developing student progress. York-Barr etal (2007, p.317) identify increased teacher support possible through modeling by and to colleagues, and feeling of being valued by colleagues. Further, in MLEs there is increased collective expertise available, more flexible and creative use of instructional time, and increased reflection on individual and collective teaching practices and individual students and their progress - all resulting in more learning from and within teaching teams about students, teaching and learning. There is a strong sense of "you are not alone" evidenced by "how much 'we' there is in the teacher voice" (Bradbeer, 2013a, Blog page).

Strengthening student progress in a MLE is also achieved through developing student confidence and agency. Leaders need to ensure support for teaching teams in providing a range of pedagogical activities that give opportunities for developing academic skills and also social key-competencies; and that the learning environment created also nurtures student social development, initiative and agency (Blackmore etal. 2010, p.50). Amos (2013, Blog page) noted from experience that within a framework of boundary goals and time frames "the more freedom you give to students to experiment and explore (in their learning), the more effective their (MLE) use becomes.

<u>Supportive infrastructure</u>
The success of MLE collaborative teacher professional learning requires supportive infrastructure. Alongside flexible space for a variety of pedagogical practices, Blackmore etal (2010, p.45) identify blocked timetabling so as to encourage team teaching, and collaboration, and allocated time for teams to meet that are dedicated to planning and reflection. York-Barr etal (2010, p.318) however warns that one of the challenges of such

practice is a sense of loss of instructional and decision-making autonomy and a sense of decreased flexibility and creativity as a consequence of the set scheduled timetable.

Teacher empowerment and agency
Teachers' attitudes, behaviours and morale within teams are a crucial aspect of the learning environment and how the teaching team makes use of space (Higgins etal. 2005, p.7). Leadership needs to promote staff motivation, commitment and perceived working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 10-11) as well as school's capacity building and the teachers' sense of individual and collective agency (Blackmore etal, 2010, p51). "Collective teacher efficacy relates to the level of confidence that group members have in their collective ability to be successful (Bradbeer, 2013a, Blog page). It is critical that leadership establishes and supports a culture which: encourages staff to take risks and experiment with the use of space, both indoors and outdoors; provides professional learning and mentoring; supports an ethos which encourages experimentation and initiative in the type of learning opportunities provided; encourages, supports and values open professional exchange where mistakes are 'allowed' and "failures can occur without blame", and instead face constructive critical review with the aim to improving next time (Blackmore etal, 2010, p50-51). In such an MLE environment teachers use such phrases as "We plan first and then decide which space best suits that learning" (Edtalk, 2013b, Blog page), "we experiment" (Edtalk, 2013a, Blog page), and "trial (something and) … see if it works and if not, then try something else" (Edtalk, 2012a, Blog page). MLE teachers have unique skills and have to "be 'adaptive experts' in terms of juggling the balance between efficiency ... and innovation" (Blackmore etal, 2010, p.47) and Leaders need to take care to support and nurture such skills.

If all this occurs, a MLE of high trust and openness will develop, with teachers possessing a sense of autonomy, self-direction, empowerment and agency. However, even then this motivation to innovate can be lost and capacity building of individuals and of the organisation will not occur, if leaders do not value, recognise, act on and reward the teachers voice and teacher efforts to improve and make a positive contribution (Blackmore etal 2010, p. 44, 51).

Appointments
Leadership can further support success in their appointments and carefully determining the make-up of MLE collaborative teacher teams. Team players and grouping teachers with compatible philosophies about professional practice is important (York-Barr etal, 2010, p.318). Compatibility however does not mean team members having to be clones of one another, rather having complimentary personal and professional strengths in different areas so as to be able to form a team which is able to provide a rounded education for the students (Morris, 2011, Blog page).

MLE Leadership Structure
Blackmore etal (2010, p.44-45) noted in their study of twelve ILE (MLE) schools that there was a tendency towards flatter structures of leadership or devolution of responsibility down to team leaders of pods and that this trend was more pronounced in smaller schools. A positive result of the flatter structure was more people involved in collaborative decision-making and a stronger sense of ownership of the MLE and new initiatives. Good communication and an effective relationship between the Principal and team leaders were seen to be particularly important and the resourcing and equipping of the leadership with devolved responsibilities was essential. Conscious decisions and succession planning early on may be needed if a new structure for the senior leadership team is thought to be necessary for the establishment of an effective MLE leadership (Neumark,

2008, p.4). Variations in the degree of devolvement and collaborative decision making was observed in the early stages of MLE establishment and more directive leadership to later stages more collaborative practices being embedded (Blackmore, 2010, p.44).

The location of the Principal's office was also seen as symbolic of the leadership style – isolated single cell offices being reflected in more directive leadership. For leaders, having congruence between beliefs, espoused priorities and what one demonstrates in practice in the MLE is important. Bradbeer (2011, Blog page) commented that for the leaders in Stonefields School, setting out to enhance collaborative practice "it seems only natural that the leadership team work in the same way (as the teachers and) … share space … (and having) a couple of smaller rooms close by" for conversations that require more privacy. While aware of only one high school with a similar shared leadership space in 2011, Bradbeer (2011, Blog page) noted that this approach "seems to be paying dividends".

Evaluative review of your MLE
On the NZ Ministry of Education website the Modern Learning Environment is priority number three after 1) Health and Safety, 2) Essential Infrastructure Projects (Ministry of education 2013a). Of the literature that does exist on Modern Learning Environments, a considerable portion is focused on ensuring standards are met in building design for the actual physical environment itself – acoustics, air quality, heating, insulation, lighting, health and safety, sustainable environment, accessibility (Ministry of Education 2013b). A MLE Assessment Tool does include focus on technology standards, flexibility of learning spaces including providing spaces and furniture for different sized groups and purposes (Ministry of Education website, 2013c)

Vision and Strategic Plan aside, Leaders need criteria against which to review and evaluate how well their MLE is meeting the needs to support 21st century learning and maintain a cycle of on-going improvement. Core-ed (nd) have provided a 'MLE Matrix' to support leaders in this important task. The Matrix raises a sequence of progressive questions under different stages of progress: Proposal, Coping, Planning, Implementation, and Maturity/Sustainability. The Matrix prompts the leader to reflect on whether he/she ensures there is/are:
- an effective PLD plan supporting alignment of pedagogical practice to MLE vision and MLE pedagogy development
- induction practices for staff equip, empower, and provide sustainable vision and practice
- allocated responsibilities match and support MLE
- structures support and maintain needed collaboration
- structures support and maintain needed flexible use of space
- ICT infrastructure and devices support MLE pedagogy and learning
- high levels of communication with all stakeholders build and support understanding of MLE
- a comprehensive approach to capture community voice
- regular review maintained of all above to ensure learners needs are being met

Along with the Matrix Core-ed (nd) also provid a series of useful questions under three key themes they identify as significant for an effective MLE providing for 21st century learning. These headings and questions are more specific and act as useful tool to focus the leader when carrying out a review of the MLE. The headings and questions are included in their entirety below:

"Ubiquity
- is learning able to happen anywhere, at any time, at any pace and with or through any device within the MLE?
- does the physical environment demonstrate sufficient flexibility and open-ness to allow this to happen?
- does the technical environment support ubiquitous access to the internet for all, with and through his/her own device?
- does the design for and facilitation of learning encourage this?

Agency
- do students have 'the power to act' in the MLE?
- are all learners empowered to make choices and decisions about how, where, what and when they learn?
- are learners a part of their own learning support network within the MLE?
- is the design of the MLE adaptive to learner needs and ambitions?

Connectedness
- is the MLE a part of a network of provision?
- do staff value being networked as a part of their own professional learning?
- does the activity of the MLE embrace and enable learning at home and other community facilities?
- does the activity of the MLE have global reach?
- does the MLE enable and support the learning of the whole community?"

A caution on transplantation
Blackmore etal, (2010, p.46) note that teachers and principals in their study of twelve MLEs "expressed caution at the notion that the ILE (MLE) could be 'transported' elsewhere and 'applied', or scaled up across a number of schools". When building teacher professional communities the MLE leader needs to be aware that context is one of "five core factors at work: context, commitment, capacity, content, and challenge … Context matters: factors such as where a community is located, the culture that surrounds it, the way it gets started and its conditions of membership combine to impact on the trajectories it takes and the challenges it faces" (Blackmore etal, 2010, p.46 citing Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p.97).

Concluding comment:
The literature review has shown the MLE context magnifies aspects of leadership in a way that is different from other settings and that leaders need to be aware of and take account of these differences. The uniqueness of context and community means that direct transplants of one MLE will not be a perfect fit in another setting. Instead there is an imperative that leaders gather the unique 'Voice' of all stake-holders in their own individual context. The unique 'Voice' of students, parents, wider community, teachers, leaders and designers need to be seriously considered, taken into account, and acted on when planning, establishing and maintaining the MLE.

The Modern Learning Environment (MLE) school, the teaching and learning that goes on in it, and in particular the leadership practice in this setting, could benefit from further research and writing.

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<u>Primary School Leadership and Modern Learning Environments</u>.
Paul Cooper
Whitiora School

2013 NZEI Primary School Principal's Sabbatical
15th July to 18th October 2013

Part Two:
A Summary of Ideas and Experiences Identified by Seven New Zealand Primary School Principals When Focusing on Their Leadership in a Modern Learning Environment (MLE) School.

Schools visited:

- o Amesbury School, Churton Park, Wellington   http://www.amesbury.school.nz
    - - Lesley Murrihy - Principal

- o Hingaia Peninsula Primary, Karaka, Auckland http://www.hingaiapeninsula.school.nz
    - - Jane Danielson - Principal

- o Hobsonville Point Primary, Auckland   http://hobsonvillepoint.school.nz
    - - Daniel Birch – Principal

- o Kilbirnie School, Hataitai, Wellington   www.kilbirnie.school.nz
    - - Mike McGimpsy - Principal

- o Stonefields School, Mt Wellington, Auckland   www.stonefields.school.nz
    - - Sarah Martin - Principal
    - - Chris Bradbeer - Associate Principal

- o Te Akau Ki Papamoa School, Papamoa   http://www.teakaukipapamoa.school.nz
    - - Bruce Jepsen - Principal

- o Welcome Bay Primary, Welcome Bay, Tauranga   http://www.welcomebay.school.nz
    - - Nik House - Principal

<u>Introduction</u>
I would like to begin by thanking the Principals of the seven schools visited for their generous giving of time and willingness to share openly their reflections on their leadership practices, and both successes and challenges, as well as thoughts on future directions in leading their modern learning environment. In order to respect the trust given, this report will not attribute specific ideas/practices/successes/challenges to specific schools. It was evident that the different schools had developed different vocabulary to describe their environment – hub, pod, learning centre, block. For clarity

and ease of reading, this report when referring to a modern learning environment, will use the term "hub" to refer to a grouping of spaces where a team of teachers work with students, and "studio" to refer to a classroom sized space and also the term "shared space" and "withdrawal space" for a larger general space and a smaller specialized space respectively. Where possible, principals' phrases are quoted, so as to be true to the ideas expressed in discussion. The quotes are ordered to provide an meaningful series of ideas. The numbers in front of quotes have no significance regarding Principal or school identity, but do indicate a different principal speaking. The use of "…" indicates a gap of unrecorded discussion.

The schools were selected because they were of moderate size and catered for students up to and including Year 8, and were spread geographically – Auckland (x3), Tauranga (x2) and Wellington (x2). Each school has what the MoE describe as a modern learning environment – 4 schools (Amesbury School, Hingaia Peninsula Primary, Hobsonville Point Primary, Stonefields School) were built new as modern learning environment schools; and 3 schools (Kilbirnie School, Te Akau Ki Papamoa School, and Welcome Bay Primary) have more traditional design classroom blocks which have received, or are in an on-going process of receiving, remodelling of part or all of their learning spaces into modern learning environments.

This Part of the sabbatical report is a summary of themes and ideas identified in discussions focusing on the experiences and thinking of MLE Principal colleagues.

MLE Leadership Structure:
A flat level leadership structure rather than the traditional triangle was strongly evident in the 4 newly built MLE schools and evident to different degrees in the other schools. Moving a school from a vertical leadership structure was considered more of a challenge than starting a new school with a flat leadership structure from the very outset, as this required changing mind-sets and expectations as opposed to a more ready openness to doing things differently in a new and visibly different school.

Leadership was described in different ways. The Leader is the "guardian of the vision", … "the gardener of a plot planting seeds", … "not sure what it looks like", … "like an atom looping out and returning to the vision", …

The principals' thinking on leadership varied and there was a considerable sense from the principals visited of "feeling our way", "exploring" and "discovering" new ways to lead in their new MLE, and that it was not static, rather, that as their schools were growing (some very rapidly indeed – 200 students in a year) they were aware that they would "have to change" and that there was a "scaling for growth issue" that needed to be kept in mind. We need to beware of "not defaulting back to traditional models", but really work through the issues. "As we grow in student numbers we have to review and go back to basic mind-sets … our practices and core values and vision. There has to be congruence between them". One AP referred to an article by Jill Blackmore when commenting on flexibility and change, agreeing with her premises when saying, "for our MLE school to maintain flexibility it has to be in 'a state of serial re-design' … it is never reaches a finished state, only 'finished beginnings'".

The key issue repeatedly identified was "it all comes back to effectiveness for student achievement" and for leaders needing to be "servant" to that. One principal commented about there being sometimes a need to sacrifice ones first inclinations, "As principal I need to 'make room' for our leadership team to be able to lead according to their strengths". Another spoke from a different perspective … "in order to ensure continuity of leadership and vision … we need an effective leadership team".

Different MLE Leadership models:
1. One Principal noted that "currently we have a flat model … but as we grow to over 500 students … some triangle aspect will probably be needed for accountability … and ultimately the buck stops with the principal ! … we may need a second level tier of leadership". This same leadership team spoke of a process of "gaining teacher voice … looking at the roles needed … and then exploring and developing a model … that will need to be signed off for the clarity of everyone".
2. "Our hubs don't need a team leader … because collaboration is not hierarchical. We do have a Principal and two teachers in the Senior Leadership Team … However with growth we are now looking at Career Pathways as a leadership structure as a second tier of leadership".
3. Another Principal noted "we use the Kiwi leadership model for our leadership structure … the Principal and APs are each responsible for one aspect – culture, pedagogy, systems, partnerships and networks … this helped to clarify roles and to facilitate consistency … tasks are allocated so that they are linked to the roles".
4. Still another commented, … "I am considering a 'governance type of process' for our leadership team … meeting two whole days a term … having a standing agenda … requiring written reports so that we can have focused thinking before-hand … teachers being released through the day to report on their responsibilities … and employing an admin person for those days for recording minutes, creating action lists and carrying out other supportive admin around those days".

In these discussions there was a common sense of vibrancy and enthusiasm to explore and discover new and better ways to lead and support all (students and teachers) in their new MLE.

The usual tyranny of time taken up in administration versus leadership was raised in various ways in all discussions.

It was evident in discussions that the brand new MLE schools were at some advantage - in that their initial staffing was projected at the level of their expected third year of operation roll, meaning that in the first two years they were working with a considerable over staffing. This of course allows for an abundance of release for their teams to establish all their school documentation, carry out PLD and build their teams.
1. At one school the principal noted "The challenge is to create space and time for big picture, high level stuff … then we can be on the cutting edge … we need time for reflection … we have employed a person to support the leadership team to free up leaders for high level stuff … we can do it (the staffing) quite easily at the moment, but in another couple of years it won't be so easy … but it is worth it, I will be making it a priority later on when we no longer have that extra staffing"
2. Another brand new MLE school principal noted he was freed up from property issues and only had to focus on learning, because they were a 'Partnership School' and all on the ground property matters were all dealt with by working through a property manager who had direct contact with contractors who did the work, and property finances were Board of Trustees and the Partners responsibility. This model is not

without its issues - while there were considerable advantages, some decisions in setting up the school could have been better, if the new principal had been involved. For instance bulk purchase of all furniture from the outset without involving the principal in the decision has left the school with a lot of furniture in storage and without any flexibility to fund an evolving thinking around the use of their environment and what furniture would best meet those needs.

Shared Office Space for Leaders:
The concept of MLE and flexible learning space was also seen to be transferred into the design of office space in 6 out of seven of the schools visited. Of the six this idea was taken furthest in the all newly built MLE schools, but space had been adapted in the other schools so at the very least a single Principal's office could be turned into a larger shared office when needed by the moving of a wall partition.

The functioning shared leadership office "parallels the teaching spaces" and enable the leadership team to "model of the collaborative practices and behaviours that are expected of students and teachers in the learning hubs".

All principals expressed very positive views of the shared office in practice – noting having a shared office "strengthened the unity of the leadership team", "creates opportunity to reflect and discuss what is seen", and "reinforces our flat leadership model". In the MLE office model "you have to be more democratic … we all see ourselves as leaders with something to contribute". More than one Principal commented, "you need to develop a good understanding of how each member of the Leadership Team works". One Principal noted "you need to be flexible – lack of ownership and hierarchy. Ours works well because there isn't a rule of who goes where", however it was observed that in other schools there were spaces that either out of habit or designation had become the space primarily or solely used by each particular member of the team.

The Principals noted, however, that "care is needed in the design" and "sometimes privacy is needed for confidential conversations and phone calls … and sometimes for 'cave space' to think and work without distraction". All the schools had at least one separate room that could be used for meeting visitor and/or the private conversations.

Primary Focus of the MLE Leadership Team:
Principals, in discussions identified a range of main factors important for success in their leading of an MLE, however they repeatedly identified as important:
a) Vision:
   Principals revealed how important the school Vision was as a touch-stone for all decisions.
   1. In an MLE "more than ever the Principal is the guardian of the Vision".
   2. "There is a need to be constantly reflecting … looking to the future … and making conscious choices ... being ok with constantly experimenting and mixing things up, trying new things … and never thinking 'we are done'".
   3. "We go away for a weekend as a leadership team … take everything we might need: finance, merging themes, curriculum data … and carry out a review of the Vision, Principles and Strategic Plan … we have a massive dialogue … we prioritise".
   4. Another Principal noted "you need courageous perseverance to lead change and to achieve a Vision".

   One Principal noted:

5. "A secure grounding in the vision is essential … in our MLE spaces are not 'owned' by any teacher … specific learning should occur in the space best suited for that learning … moving then becomes essential … Mindset !!! is a constant challenge" .

The Principal of one school which has been visited by many others particularly stressed,

6. "Don't just do it because others are doing it … it *has* to fit *your* context and support *your* vision, not that of another school".

One common aspect of the MLEs visited was the awareness of Leadership for the need for flexibility in the use of space for their vision to succeed. Principals noted:

1. "I have to work very hard to protect and maximise organisational flexibility. Without organisational flexibility we can't have Team teaching!".
2. Another commented "You need to create time for talk … it is essential for empowering people to be responsible. You also need organisational flexibility to be maximised … including timetabling … When decision-making ask: 'Is this decision going to extend or limit our flexibility?'... for example: not too many meetings, not too many notices, consciously creating time for teachers".
3. "I am surprised how much structure is needed … and how much you need to consult on structures. This is necessary because of the collaborative nature of the MLE and accountability level that are a part of the MLE.
4. "Careful timetabling of the hub 'shared-space' is necessary so that Team teaching is possible and learning progress is not disturbed.

b) <u>Voice</u>:

Due to the higher levels of collaboration in an MLE, stakeholders having a 'Voice' is considered vital.

1. In an MLE "you have to give everyone a 'Voice' … students, parents and teachers".
2. "Teacher 'Voice' is a crucial for effectiveness … feeling valued … having a sense of agency … and feeling part of the community"
3. "The Principal must have the ability to listen ... to everything … because you don't know where the next revelation will come from … (as a consequence) you need diversity around you".
4. "In an MLE you are walking in unknown territory. An ability to respond is important … you need to be quickly responsive if you are not to slip back".
5. "It is about people first with a focus on children's learning … need to retain student Voice … relationship with our community … within this Voice empowerment there needs to be respect for boundaries … You have to let people see you are authentic and trustworthy".
6. "As a Principal I am now happy to go in with a blank slate to staff and a leadership team … listening sincerely to voice is essential … having a process is the key - gather voice, collate, analyse … the value I add is to analyse, synthesize and evaluate. … Being vulnerable and not going in with a solution is important … I maintain a future focus and focus on student positive outcomes … change momentum comes from 'ground-up' and is sourced in 'Voice'. Making things achievable is identifying little steps moving in the right direction … it is necessary to 'have faith that we will get there'".
7. "Act on ideas expressed in … Voice … it promotes a strong sense of … agency"

8. "As a leader I need to be aware not to leave behind my leadership team and teaching team … need to take people on a journey with me. This is important if you are a conceptual person … you must not get too far ahead of staff … and be careful not to assume your thinking is the same as everyone else".

c) Trust:
 Trust, honesty, and relationship were mentioned or alluded to again and again during the visits. At its core Principals identified the need for Leadership Teams and teachers to:

 1. "Constantly explore new ground". … And "to take grounded well considered risks … to be prepared not to get it right the first time … be prepared to adapt and change structure until it is right and fully supporting the evolving setting" (W).

For this to happen, Principals saw Trust as crucial and as being supported by building a sense of ownership and positive relationships.

1. "Everyone has responsibilities … everyone, even a BT, can provide leadership … Leadership can come from anyone in the team".
2. "There has to be trust in teachers to provide bottom-up innovation … be willing to let teachers run with their idea … and for them to know 'it is OK if you don't get it right the first time … encouraging and building confidence is important"
3. "Imparting a sense of 'agency' is important … a sense empowerment".
4. "Trust between teachers is a key factor … this is amplified within a hub when done well … the synergy magnifies effectiveness".
5. "Often the causes of 'Trust' not working are small … meeting times, tardiness, tidiness, noise levels … these can lead to a lack of respect and then lowering levels of communication … Respecting others opinions is essential … there is great value in diversity … you don't want all views the same! It is essential that all understand that challenging and questioning ideas is not the same as disrespecting those ideas".

The importance of honesty was closely linked by several principals to the ability to have robust discussions.

1. "You have to be able to have robust discussions … honesty is essential … being prepared to say it as you see it … staff need to have identified 'what mountains am I prepared to die on and which will I let pass by, give way on … and in any matter know, 'How can I achieve a 'win-win' result'".
2. "Teacher capacity to have collaborative 'hard-to-have' conversations, doesn't just happen … training is needed in these skills … shared values are what you fall back on … agreements on process and timeliness are essential".

d) Relationships:
Principals' comments about 'Trust' and 'Honesty' were often intertwined with comments about the quality of 'Relationships'.

1. "The more open and honest the individual in the MLE the more respect and trust is generated … the level of honesty and accuracy with which colleagues talk about their practices, builds trust in them"
2. "Honest relationships are essential"

3. "You need to be open about your mistakes … you have to address your own issues as well as others issues … leaders need to develop and model a balanced relationship between personal and professional … relational intelligence is important".

4. "First is Culture which enables the Vision. Leadership's task is to hold people true to the Vision … to look for congruence between Vision and practice … to ask questions that prompt reflection and the aligning of practice and belief to Vision … Many learning conversations are needed. … Leadership needs to catch the team in moments of being good … give genuine praise that reinforces … that is timely and in the moment".

5. "Often at issue in relationships is 'locus of control' … you can't have power relationships in an MLE hub … it comes back to learners having ownership, the hub and MLE is for students. Behaviours surface the hidden beliefs … and beliefs stem from our narratives. You can't be 'the star' in your hub … it is all about 'we-go' not 'ego' … 'our kids' not 'my kids'".

<u>Team building to achieve a learning community</u>:
The challenge of team building was another common theme mentioned by all Principals and discussions all included "finding the right person".
Appointments:
1. "Getting the right teacher is a challenge … some quality teachers feel uncomfortable in an MLE … we make sure we show the applicants the hubs during the interview process".

2. "The appointment process must identify a team member … this is more important in a MLE than elsewhere. … In our school there is the challenge of having single cell and MLE … there are some advantages (in this) as we can select best suited teachers for each".

3. "Developing a collaborative community of teachers is about linking the right people together".

4. "We ask, 'How do you see yourself taking up the Vision and running with it?" … everything needs to link back to the Vision".

5. "I like to visit short-listed applicants in their current setting … and see how they are perceived by kids and their colleagues … their relationships".

6. "We have all the applicants together and see how they interact with other applicants … and provide a cooperative a planning scenario for them".

7. "We ask the applicant to give a 10 minute presentation during the interview … as a leader, along with all the other teachers in the hub and MLE they will need to present ideas and provide leadership".

8. "As with all our teacher appointments, we are looking for people with potential … we want to grow leaders … we ask, 'What does the applicant bring to leadership?' and 'What are their undergirding leadership skills, perhaps not yet recognised?'".

9. "During the interview process we focus on the applicants' vision and principles … about them as learners … their ability to negotiate space, and time and ability respond to change".

What immediately follows the appointment was also seen as crucial.

1. "Induction is key … we focus on Vision and procedures … planning and our inquiry model … team building … code of ethics in our school … MLE accountability to colleagues and what it means in our school".
2. "Our Induction … focuses on … our student profile … and capacity to: learn, … collaborate, … make meaning, … and breakthrough … - how the essence of each fulfils our vision principle".

Parent Community:
The Principals visited all mentioned their parent community, saw them as integral members of the school community, and recognised that:
1. "there is a need to win over your community".
2. "to bring your community with you" to be a successful MLE".
3. "The challenge is to communicate what we are doing … being experimental, it is sometimes hard to say what we are doing … it is hard to say it succinctly … especially as it is an emerging reality and complex".
We need to:
4. "… demystify learning as a process in MLE".
5. "… help them understand that not everyone learns the same thing at the same time".
6. "… help them understand the vision … how and why we do what we do".
Principals also identified that this was an on-going challenge and one to be met each year with the new batch of parents.
7. "Parent involvement … we are constantly challenging – 'What does it look like?' … pushing the boundary on drawing them in … constantly asking: 'Is there more? Is there further we can go?' Challenging our own mental models of what it looks like".
For active involvement Principals expressed
8. "You need to allow time … to create time … for parents to be involved in the MLE".
9. "We find our MLE design and layout supports parent involvement … it provides nooks and crannies for them to be involved with individual students and small groups".

Discussion revealed that the Principals had put in a lot of reflection and had attempted different strategies to bring about a parent involved community. Different strategies used included:
1. "Providing an enrolment package answering many of their questions".
2. "At enrolment we spend 30 minutes explaining MLE pedagogy and learning … gather a data base of parent skills they can bring to the school and information on their availability … explain our expectations – that they are active involved learners with their children".
3. "Very newsy newsletters to educate our parents"
4. "In each newsletter we provide a URL links to a T-talk or a document for reading … it can be on anything to do with learning or the future world that their children will be entering when they leave school".
As well as educating and imparting information, 'Parent Voice' was also considered important:
5. "We have regular parent conferences each term"

6. "Parent meetings are held in the hubs because we find parents feel more comfortable and relaxed with coming into the MLE hubs".
7. "At least three evening 'coffee table' discussions each term – each table discussion is led by a teacher … topics have included: pedagogy, assessment practices, IT blended learning, why learning is like it is".
8. "We have termly 'Focus Group' meetings where, by invitation, 6-8 parent representatives of the community meet for discussion on a topic relevant to the MLE and community … in order to gather an in-depth perspective".
9. "We use GOOGLE forms as a way to canvas parent thinking … we did the first one at a parent conference so we could build their confidence in using them".

Several Principals noted the challenge of parent or wider community negative perception or miss-understanding, and identified strategies they have used respond to such a challenge:
1. "You need to respond quickly and to manage your image consciously … PR is needed to combat negative or un-informed gossip … you need to maintain effective communication".
2. "You need to respond in positive ways".
3. "Part of the solution is to provide detail of what is happening and why. … Children's voice is the best advert of success".
4. "It is important that the school is open for parents to see their kids learning in action".
5. "Promoting positive ERO reports is effective".
6. "Accentuate the positives: … utilizing space … more effective use of resources … supporting 21st C learning … interpersonal skills development …(etc)".
7. "Sometimes you have to 'over-communicate' … because MLEs are different … invite them more often to express their 'Voice'".
8. "Whenever possible respond and act on ideas expressed in 'Community Voice' … even if they are small things, and advertise that you have done so in the next newsletter … it promotes a sense of being heard … being involved … of agency".

In order to combat miss-understanding Principals significantly also noted:
9. "Media always focus on the extremes of differentness"
10. "You also need to emphasise commonalities with standard learning settings".
11. "… with traditional schools".
12. You have to sometimes state 'How you are the same as others' … NZC, National Standards, ERO … sometimes even to remind the Board of Trustees".

The MLE and the digital world
While the physical world was the first and most noticeable feature of the MLEs visited, the digital world dimension of the MLE came up in conversation in each school.
1. "We are adapting a historical reality into a future vision".
2. "A physical space is one aspect of our MLE – it is flexible, accessible (etc), but the digital world of the MLE needs to parallel the physical … be responsive and flexible … We are looking to have our digital world on a par with out MLE … we are working on this".

As with most schools in the country funding of IT and the challenge of constant issues with digital devices were mentioned. It was evident good relationships with skilled community members and with an IT company, and a contracted IT person/company for support were positive factors to effective solutions.

Some of the MLEs visited had chosen a path where the digital IT world was a prominent part of their overall identity and learning, for others it was more a supporting component to the learning.

Components of the digital world identified were:
- Wireless internet access was prominent
- Laptops / Google Chrome Books / Netbooks / and i-pads
- To a lesser extent desktop computers
- Other digital devices – cameras, smart phones

After this also seen to a greater or lesser degree were:
- Active Boards
- Green screen walls for digital film editing
- Large TVs in classrooms and foyer entrances
- Apple TV work stations
- School Radio station
  - Started with music, then teaching Te Reo Maori
- School TV station – news broadcasts
- Option of learning in a digital classroom where 85% or work is digital

Access to a school web-site from home for students and parents was evident for over half of the schools and a direction the others were moving towards.

The degree to which this was an integral part of learning varied and in all cases was being developed.

The IT infrastructure needed is considerable, and a lot of it not so easily seen as the devices and specialist spaces needed for the above. An incredible amount of work was being put into establishing effective digital worlds that parallel the MLE physical worlds. A few of the schools were investing notable effort into developing an undergirding support platform for greater effectiveness:

1. "Resources must be linked to pedagogy".
2. "We are developing scaffolds for our digital space … commonalities of language … key bottom line expectations for planning … providing a space for teachers to go to find basics for their planning … getting learning progressions on-line so kids can access them (a way to get kids involved in choices) … not cluttering up teachers with meetings or e-mails".
3. "ICT PLD is important … although we expect certain IT skills when we appoint a new teacher"

A number of schools were starting to seriously explore 'Bringing-Your-Own-Devices' BYOD by students in school – this was prompted by three main factors:
- the view that learning is individualized and personal and as a consequence a student bringing their digital devices configured to them as individuals was a

natural next step. (Suitable infrastructure and family access to devices were seen as issues to be addressed).
- the pace at which change occurred in IT making any rental or purchase almost immediately out-dated .
- the reality of on-going demand and unsustainable growth of funding IT costs on the school budget.

Individual and Team development.
The Principals visited identified Individual and Team development for the MLE as a complex matter and a challenge.

1. "There is the on-going challenge of employing 'fresh staff' and maintaining their freshness … the people we employ are prepared to walk the journey on the edge … they are reflective and able to review … but freshness has to be planned".
2. "We need to maintain momentum … these are exciting times and sustainability is essential … so that it is not just a flash in the pan. … Momentum must be extremely inclusive … founded on commitment and care and love for kids".
3. However on Principal noted, "Momentum is not so much an issue, as in many respects we are still in the honeymoon period".
4. "The issue is to keep pushing and not go back to old practices … not falling into the 1970s Open Plan demise of default practice pedagogy ... knowing when to challenge and when not to is important – difficult!".
5. "I have to be careful not to swamp others with excitement about another new idea".

Individual and Team development varies according to each school, however, some themes could be identified.

1. "Positive on-going observation within hubs in of itself provides modelling and professional development … (also) monitoring can be subtle and on-going".
2. "Each hub has its own identity".
3. "Leadership wants to build an organisational culture that is a learning community, but how long do you keep a hub team together? – 2 years? 3 years? Before you have an internal shuffle?. … As a team progresses, deeper levels of conversation are possible … research shows group development goes through 'Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning' … timing is important".
4. "Initiatives are shared, not just (belonging to) the leaders … and all about positive student outcomes".
5. "You don't want hubs to develop 'group think' – 'us' versus 'them'. When you change hubs a grieving will occur … you need to give warning and time for preparation. … If a team is not working, what do you do about it and who is responsible? – I try and put the ball back in the teachers' court".

Professional Learning Development (PLD)
The need for quality PLD was identified by all Principals. Not surprisingly each school went about this in different ways, yet there were threads that were unique to MLEs.

1. "In MLEs high flying teachers have had to become like new teachers … you have to develop team skills and practices … it's not for everyone".
2. "The challenge is creating space to think big".

3. "There is a huge challenge around PLD … it is what feeds you at the cutting edge".
4. With PLD, "we make baby steps towards our 'Vision'".

Different approaches had been used in the different schools and even within a school.
1. "We have focused on developing a sound pedagogy so we are all on the same page".
2. "Our PLD focus has been to learn the process in context, for example reading. Due to a need to be responsive to our community we have focussed on curriculum and learning process … only in our third year are we now looking at collaboration etc".
   …
   "As a staff we spent time drilling down into notions of collaboration … it is about working together, but also … cooperation, coordinating, as well as collaboration. Teachers need to know up front which part of planning and teaching requires all together cooperation, coordinating, collaborating … which tasks are cooperating, and which tasks are individual … Collaboration theory has networking, coordinating, cooperation, collaboration, and then co-adunation – growing into partnership, but leaving a bit of yourself behind … it requires reconceptualising yourself as a teacher … a willingness to sacrifice/give away/surrender something … we have had an intentional focus on mind-sets … collaboration and beliefs. John Hattie's 'Blue Book' talks of teacher mind-sets and being evaluators of one's own practices".
3. "Our PLD priority has been on development of the team … use of space … congruence between what kids are doing and use of space as designed".
4. "Our real emphasis has been on cooperative teacher planning".
5. "We have been focusing on 'How can we make best use of the shared area – with a blend of individual, group and class teaching. Prior to that we had a whole year PLD focusing on collaborative practice and shared pedagogy and cooperative teaching".

Sourcing PLD:
1. We don't use advisors etc … they are not at the cutting edge and don't have enough knowledge of working in MLEs".
2. "Being unique is a challenge … because we are constantly breaking new ground … innovating. There are no close parallels … so we can't even visit others (MLEs) that are a 'close like'".

Nearly all Principals spoke of relying to some degree on their own internal resources for PLD. Their approaches included:
1. "Reflective sessions … Brainstorming … you really need quality time for this".
2. "Reflective review sessions are held in the hubs".
3. "Professional readings or u-tube presentations are used to spark reflection and give focus to a PLD priority".
4. "TEDs – Teacher Effectiveness Dialog groups … they are teacher inquiry groups – evidence based and data informed … they are about acknowledging reality and personal challenges and not waiting too long to gather data to see if an intervention has been effective. The TEDs are across hubs … groups of three …

like professional learning circles ... the teachers all prepare 5 minute TEDs – u-tube reports … the TEDs report back on a termly basis".

5. "Staff are currently co-authoring a chapter of a book 'Causing Learning' focusing on 'What deliberate things do we do?'".

A couple of Principals noted:

6. "We have contributed at conferences … it is good for us to focus our thinking and to present".

However one added: "… but we often find not much in return when we attend conferences".

Staying fresh as a leader:

Several of the Principals identified "staying fresh as a leader" was a need they were aware of. This was also linked to "maintaining edginess and innovation".
"I need:

1. "Challenges in leadership … if I am to stay at the cutting edge".
2. "To expose myself to new things and innovation".
3. "To free up time for reflection".
4. "To re-structure time to focus on big thinking".

Suggestions included:

5. "Professional academic study".
6. "Professional readings".
7. "Social media … both listening and creating".
8. "Networking … on-line groups and in the physical".   [VLN, LinkedIn, CoreEd]
9. "Visiting other schools".
10. "Conferences".

A common caution around people "over doing things'' was also expressed in a number of ways. One Principal summed it up:

11. "Burn-out is a real challenge … balance of time and space … personal and professional … for everyone – leadership and staff".

Awareness of the issue in-and-of-itself was seen as part of the solution, and being "careful not to over-commit" was something Principals identified they had to be conscious of, both for on behalf of staff and for themselves.

Supporting Teachers:

All Principals visited saw one of their main tasks as supporting their teachers.

1. "Teachers need some structures. The Vision is like a 'platform or stage', props are needed … for example expectations, teacher effectiveness framework, reading continuum, curriculum statements … need to keep them to the minimum, so that there is room for people to come to the stage … to improvise. … It is understood the minimum expectations are a guide, the job may require more".
2. "We see a difference between: Professional development – provided for the individual; and Professional learning – which is self-directed. We have a greater emphasis on Professional learning. … The key is to identify goals which will grow them as educators. … With Appraisal Goals the teachers need to provide evidence … we set goals – personal / team / school-wide".

3. "There is a need for teachers to have an open mind, being prepared to try something new. This is supported by including teachers in the discussion, then they feel part of it … Ask: How might we do this? … What would you do if we had to …? … You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink … you need to get the teachers leading through the strategic questioning. … I make a statement that is non-negotiable … 'Student learning results need to improve' - then how we are going to do this is discussed by the teachers … how we can make it work … make it happen".

4. "Staff understand the NZC and the intent of the curriculum and the Key Competencies (dispositional) … and their balance with assessment (National Standards). The risk is that we forget what our school is about … the triangle of Vision / Values and Belief / Pedagogy … All needs to fit within this triangle. Ask what is the thinking behind what you do? Does it fit within the triangle".

5. "The challenge is to give time to what effective practice looks like - shared Vision and shared view and understanding of the practice which supports and brings about the Vision. If the shared thinking does not include a shared view of practice, then it is very easy to revert to old practices".

It was evident that Principals were always on the lookout to identify and try new strategies to support teachers, if they thought they would help achieve their Vision and improve student achievement.

1. "We are a work in progress".

2. "We have tried several models of organisation: - streaming across the hubs, students staying with one teacher, students graduating to the next teacher … however complexity of tracking data has impacted on practicalities. … We have also tried different combinations of teachers in the hubs … personalities make a difference … a gender mix of teachers has been positive".

3. "We have adjusted our expectations – at first we wanted all dividers open, but now I am OK with it closed at different times, because I know it is open for some of the learning … the degree it is open is depending on the expertise of the teacher … over time it is becoming more open and working together … the need to plan and coordinate what learning is occurring when is driving this."

4. "We have identified that differences between hubs can cause problems for kids as they progress … so we scaffold so differences are not so great".

5. "We have meetings for data conversations and to review groupings progress. Our students used to opt for sessions with their teacher – at least 2x per week, but we discovered some kids were not selecting well, so we changed to 4 sessions per week – 2 options students selected and 2 teachers selected. The change was brought about by: reflective discussion that was data driven, high level trust in colleagues … and intuition".

6. We have "developed 'Shift Happens' charts for an accessible visual tracking of student achievement progress … (they) provide good prompts for discussion … and identifying and monitoring targeted students".

7. "We carry out 'Climate Interviews' … as a way to gain teacher voice … they can be useful, although sometimes for every person's positive view their can be someone who has a negative … you can't please all the people all the time".

8. "With extra staffing for our first three years of setup, a lot has been possible … Every week we have a walk through – all the leadership team participate supporting one another … three sets of eyes … there are great discussions following. Also every week I spend 10 minutes with each staff member … initially teachers found it hard – that their practice was being so closely examined … now it is seen as a growing thing – often now they txt during out of school time giving their reflection on discussions. … Office staff also participate – they need to articulate pedagogy as they are the front line people, the first people visitors meet.

As mentioned earlier maintaining flexibility alongside structures was seen as an important way of supporting teachers, as too was creating time opportunities for teachers to meet and work together as collaborative teams. Digital world platforms for supporting teacher collaboration were also evident and were a focus in several of the schools for on-going adaption and strengthening to be more effective.

Supporting Students

In all the discussions with Principals, students learning and success was at the heart of the thinking, ideas expressed and initiatives taken. As already mentioned, student Voice was seen as valuable in grounding new initiatives – some had also had student Voice feature prominently in the idea/concept gathering stage of their MLE design work.

Student needs were at the centre of organisational decisions on how the MLE functioned.

1. "In each hub the children have their own Whanau Teacher … it is these teachers job to know about that child … to be the 'Learning Advocate' for that child … they are the first port of call for parents".
2. "Kids who need support … need a more cohesive relationship with *one* teacher, over time they then grow in capacity to relate with others. In MLE other teachers also know the routines and practices which are visible and scaffold to support each individual child … An MLE gain is that the teacher wrap-around is more immediate for the child … this helps the immediate teacher to de-escalate the matter and in doing so that teacher is able to build a stronger relationship which will serve the child better in the future".
3. "Our special needs students are supported by the MLE hub design. … the whole school is main stream, but sound proofed withdrawal spaces support these children … they know they can go to certain spaces when they need time out to re-focus".
4. "We have a system of different levels of supervision … they are indicative of decreasing or increasing levels of being able to self-manage: -
   - Independent … can learn anywhere
   - Monitored standard … general expectation
   - Monitored closely
   - Supervised … needs considerable support staying on task
   - Guided … special needs (high level of support needed)

   Each student can apply for consideration to be shifted and if successful then negotiate as to which level of supervision they can work under".

Several of the schools visited have identified a 'student learner profile' and have been working of developing rubrics around the learning progressions that are friendly to children and parents.

5. "We have identified a XX School Learner Profile that has been developed by staff and students (using the Hermon's Brain perspective) … it identifies 'My Thinking' / 'My Learning' / 'My Relationships' … children mark where they are at on the scale 3x per year".

6. "We are currently creating learning rubrics that will be available for kids … they are developed with kids and parents in mind. … Kids have a 'Personal Learning Treaty' … they set goals … and identify examples of what they are going to do and evidence for that learning. … These will be able to support work at home. …Children will ultimately be able to tag rubric entries – tagging their competencies … and create a 'Wordle' showing their progress".

7. "Having scaffolds of common language across the school positively supports students in their learning".

The schools visited have also been very creative about timetabling and exploring the providing of 'choice' around learning for students.

8. "We have a Hub 'Individual Weekly Planner' for each student … they are different in each hub … we tried using these within Google calendar … but there are definite advantages on paper and visibly on display. The timetable provides boundaries … some slots are specified … some are open for choice of workshops. Some students have more choice than others … 'Must do' sessions are specified; 'Can do' sessions are different for different kids; 'Bonus' sessions are if you are behind in learning or if you want to push forward (for gifted); 'Goal Maths' is individualised to curriculum progressions and learning matrix – children with guidance from their teacher target skills where there are gaps in their learning … they co-construct how they will learn this – design what they will do, what resources they will need, and identify success indicators; 'I time' is independent time with a focus of their choice".

9. "We have 'Breakthrough' sessions … this is time for individualised learning, although it can be with a group … The learning inquiry is linked to the curriculum with specified goals and success indicators that are worked out by the student in discussion with the teacher … students complete mind maps providing a framework identifying components of their learning - 'Building Knowledge', 'Making Meaning' and 'Applying Understanding' ".

Setting Up the MLE
a) Factors contributing to success:
While it is obvious a multitude of factors unique to each context contributed to the success of each MLE, Principals identified the following as worth comment:

1. "All decisions have to align with the Vision … care is needed that you don't shut off possibilities by the decisions you make … that you maintain openness and flexibility".

2. "It is necessary for the Principal to have a clear picture of the Vision … taking into account the 'Voice' of all … and being prepared to make decisions".

3. It is important that the Leadership Team are aligned in thinking, Vision, and direction … with a focus on 'who we are' rather than 'what we teach'".

On a more physical level:

4. If you have to resource from scratch, ask, 'What resources do we really want?' 'Could we not do without?' … Create a wish list when first mentioned – then come back to it and ask, 'Do we still want it?' … Make conscious decisions about resources and furniture".

5. "Create flexibility … when ordering furniture order less than the 1-1 desk/chair per student … so you can evolve and make targeted purchases later … (and) be open to different types of furniture that will support your vision of learning".

6. "When it is time for 'Hand-over' at completion … make sure you have all the information you need for everything to work well … or be fixed. … Our hand-over could have been more informative".

The Principals also noted:

7. "We gained from those who went before us … compared with previous MLEs we had additional MoE support when we asked for it".

b) <u>Things to do differently</u>:

One school which is a 'Partner school' noted:

1. "I would have … purchased the furniture differently … according to our needs"

What happened:
   ○ Before the Principal was employed, all furniture purchasing decisions had been made and purchases completed at ratio 1-1 for over 500 students (targeted full school) – a large amount of furniture is currently in storage … and the school is locked into the decisions made before even students were enrolled.

What would have been better:
   ○ Furniture ratios purchased under the 1-1 ratio for chairs/desks per student
   ○ Have furniture purchasing staggered to cater for increases in students
      • To allow for flexibility in identifying needs and opportunity to act on that:
         ▪ As the school grows
         ▪ As the school evolves in knowing itself
         ▪ As the school develops its vision, pedagogy, and practice

Several Principals noted concern about start-up staffing, which could be best summarised in the advice:

1. "Ask the MoE to permit employing teachers differently … so PLD and team building is possible earlier:"

What happened:
   ○ Before the MLE start: the Principal is employed 1year prior, the DP is employed 6 months prior, and teachers only 2 days before opening day!!

What would have been better:
   ○ Teachers be employed a couple of months early (this already occurs for new Secondary Schools) so that:
      • It is possible to develop a sense of team and how the MLE works
      • Teachers can participate in PLD to prepare them for curriculum delivery in their new MLE environment
      • Teachers can participate and 'own' the establishing of structures and documentation supporting the MLE success.

In particular several Principals emphasised:
2. "Don't be afraid to ask the MoE" for something different than proposed.

In Conclusion
This Sabbatical Report in the first half has looked at the literature specifically focused on and relating to Modern Learning Environments and their leadership. While I have found the literature useful in many regards, I think there is much scope for further specific writing on MLE leadership.

Many of the points brought out in the literature have been echoed in the second half the report which has captured the 'Voice' of the seven MLE Principals visited.

The 'Voice' gathered has been, as much as possible, quoted in a way to maintain the accuracy and flow of thinking of each Principal and also organised in such a way that reflects wider thinking along different themes. In the visits and completing this task I have had a strong sense of the uniqueness of each MLE and its context, and of leaders facing the common challenge of best meeting the needs of student learning. I have also been impressed with the leadership and their teams, how they work together and their creative and diverse responses to meeting those challenges in their unique contexts. I am also aware that the Principals were very much of a view that they were on a journey of discovery, constantly exploring and reviewing, adapting and changing what they do, in a quest to best meet their students learning needs. Thank you for welcoming me into your Modern Learning Environments and letting me explore with you your practice and reflections on leadership in your setting.

I hope this report, both literature review and gathering of MLE leadership 'Voice', will be useful both to those who have hosted my visits and to those who are considering leadership of MLE schools in the future.

In Appreciation
I have found this Principal's Sabbatical a refreshing and professionally invigorating opportunity. My special thanks to:
- NZEI for providing Principal's Sabbaticals
- Each of the seven Principals visited who so generously gave of their time and openly shared their thinking and experiences in MLE leadership … I wish you and your teams all well in your continued journey of MLE leadership.
- Whitiora School Board of Trustees for approving this sabbatical opportunity
- The team at Whitiora School who have continued in strength during my absence.