PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL REPORT

**Craig McCarthny
St Heliers School, Auckland
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*How can traditional school environments be adapted
or redesigned in order to implement modern
innovative learning pedagogies?*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEFINITION

For the purpose of this report I use the following definitions from the Ministry of Education.

What is an Innovative Learning Environment? *(initially called Modern Learning Environments)*

A learning environment may be understood to be the complete physical, social and pedagogical context in which learning is intended to occur.

An innovative environment is one that is capable of evolving and adapting as educational practices evolve and change – thus remaining future focussed.

In the past the term Modern Learning Environments (MLE) has been used. Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) has greater international usage and growing discomfort in NZ with the term MLE.

What is an Innovative Learning Space?

Physical spaces are only part of the contribution to an ILE.

The term Innovative Learning Spaces (ILS) is used to refer to school classrooms but may include any designated place of learning such as science laboratories, teachers' staffrooms, gymnasiums, and the interaction between these spaces.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the sabbatical was to investigate and build on my knowledge of Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) in order to ensure that there are improved valued outcomes for the students of our school.

BACKGROUND

St Heliers School has a special place in the history of the Tamaki District. First established in the area in 1877, it has been on its current site since 1907 and is built in a traditional model of single cell classrooms.   Since that time new buildings have been added as the roll has grown.

In 1989 the 'Tomorrow's Schools' model was introduced, under which schools became self-managing, autonomous entities.

Since that date, education has undergone significant changes in administration, management, teaching and learning and in school design.

Our School Vision states;

> ***St Heliers School is a welcoming community that stands for***
> ***excellence in academic achievement and in all other areas***
> ***of school life and fosters independent, well-rounded students.***
>
> ***A community that is innovative and encouraging, where sound***
> ***Values underpin all school activities.***

The Vision requires us to be constantly evaluating how the curriculum is delivered, building on the established excellent teaching and learning whilst embracing future-focused teaching and learning including innovative learning environments.

The Ministry of Education's "NZ School Property Strategy 2011-2021' sets out the vision and goals for school property, with the aim of having well-maintained schools supporting a modern education system.

Goal two of the strategy **Schools are Fit for Purpose** talks about the relationship between teaching & learning and environments. It states that approaches to teaching and learning have changed over the last 20 years and that while classrooms are still the most highly utilised areas in school, they need to respond to these changes for modern education delivery.

Innovative design with an emphasis on spaces that support flexible styles of teaching and learning is now at the forefront of new school design and existing school re-models and renovations.

CHALLENGE

The challenge for a traditionally built school like St Heliers, is how to incorporate this goal of modernising classrooms using innovative learning environment principles to improve educational outcomes for students.

METHODOLOGY

I visited a number of schools in Auckland and in surrounding areas that have developed the use of existing buildings and classroom environments into innovative learning environments.

The visits were three-fold:

1. To discuss with the Principal or leadership team their thinking behind innovative teaching and learning practises.
2. How changing the physical environment supports these practices.
3. To view the remodelled spaces.

FINDINGS

The findings are based on broad questions discussed at each school.

Why introduce MLEs into your school?

- ❖ It personalises the learning
- ❖ Encourages collaboration and sharing
- ❖ Higher levels of student engagement
- ❖ Learning becomes self-directed
- ❖ It is connected to the modern world
- ❖ Learning is authentic
- ❖ It gives students choice
- ❖ Spaces are created for modern teaching and learning
- ❖ Students identify own gaps and next learning steps
- ❖ Students lead learning.
- ❖ Spaces are created (with MLE Furniture) that allow a variety of learning activities to take place.

How do you know it works?

- ❖ Students have a great attitude
- ❖ Students are confident and articulate about their learning
- ❖ National Standards data is good (either has not dropped or has improved)
- ❖ Greater student voice in leading learning
- ❖ Key competencies have increased immensely
- ❖ Parents and students happy
- ❖ Students more independent, more collaborative
- ❖ Students taking ownership of, and talking about their learning.

What are the main advantages?

- ❖ Teachers working together collaboratively
- ❖ Teachers teaching to their strengths
- ❖ Students knowing they work with more than one teacher and have access to all teachers
- ❖ Students see teachers collaborating, therefore modelling for student collororation.
- ❖ Shared decision making between teacher and student
- ❖ More professional discussion among teachers
- ❖ Gives students flexibility to relate to more teachers
- ❖ Students have more choice of friends and who they work with
- ❖ Students have more choice over learning and next learning steps
- ❖ More enjoyable environment for staff and students
- ❖ More dynamic learning environment.

What are the main disadvantages?

- ❖ Teachers who are not compatible
- ❖ In traditional classrooms it is difficult to create break-out spaces
- ❖ Some students did not like the noise or busyness of the space
- ❖ Traditional teachers sharing spaces and students.

What was the process you engaged in to introduce ILE into your school?

- ❖ Used an expert facilitator
- ❖ Initial discussions with staff about ILE
- ❖ Intensive professional learning & development
- ❖ Links to the Vision of the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) – Confident, Connected, Actively Involved and Lifelong Learners
- ❖ Links to Effective Pedagogy of the NZC
- ❖ Guest speakers
- ❖ Visited schools who had introduced ILE
- ❖ Students developed learning journals and blogs
- ❖ Explore existing spaces for re-designed possibilities
- ❖ Asked teachers and students what an ideal space might look like
- ❖ Series of parent meetings
- ❖ Invited expressions of interest from teachers interested in setting up an ILE space
- ❖ Part of school development with a strategic focus
- ❖ Allowed teachers to have choice.

IMPLICATIONS

➤ The pedagogy of ILE needs to be thoroughly discussed and agreed upon as a model for the school, either fully or in-part. There are long-term, strategic implications for any such change in pedagogy.

➤ While new build schools are purposefully built as ILE, it is not a straight forward exercise, and perhaps at times not feasible, for traditionally built schools like St Heliers to develop existing because of building constraints and funding.

➤ Adequate PLD funding would need to be budgeted for.

➤ Board and staff visits to schools which have been on the ILE journey would be essential.

➤ Composition of teaching teams would need to be carefully managed, taking into consideration particular strengths and personalities of individuals.

➤ Parent education would be paramount.

➤ Involving children, as well as staff, in the design process and furniture selections would add authenticity to the development.

CONCLUSIONS

➢ Although the physical spaces in the schools I visited were different from St Heliers, much of the teaching practise and student learning I observed was similar to St Heliers.

➢ The aspects of the 'Findings' section of this report are extremely desirable. Many of these are already evident at St Heliers. It would be beneficial for the staff to identify which aspects are not evident at St Heliers, or partially evident, and how we could develop them either in existing or re-modelled spaces.

➢ Personalised learning is a fundamental aim of today's education philosophy and is a key aspect of ILE. Maintaining academic vigour, while at the same time, wanting students to have greater choice, ownership and be self-directed in their learning, needs to be carefully thought through, planned and most importantly, monitored.

➢ Personalised learning is highly desirable through engagement in authentic, directed based inquiry and personal interest inquiry.

➢ Taking into account the age of the children, a combination of compulsory and optional workshops or lessons encourages independence and children taking more ownership of their learning.

➢ Greater dialogue between teachers and students at the planning stage of a unit, area of study or inquiry would encourage greater student voice and choice, and enhance teacher and student learning relationships.

➢ Collaboration among teachers during teaching time gives teachers the opportunity to share practise, model good practise and jointly approach problem solving.

➢ Although it is not the core of successful teaching & learning, digital technologies in ILE is a fundamental element, therefore sufficient professional development and devices need to be budgeted for. A specialist e-learning co-ordinator is highly desirable.