

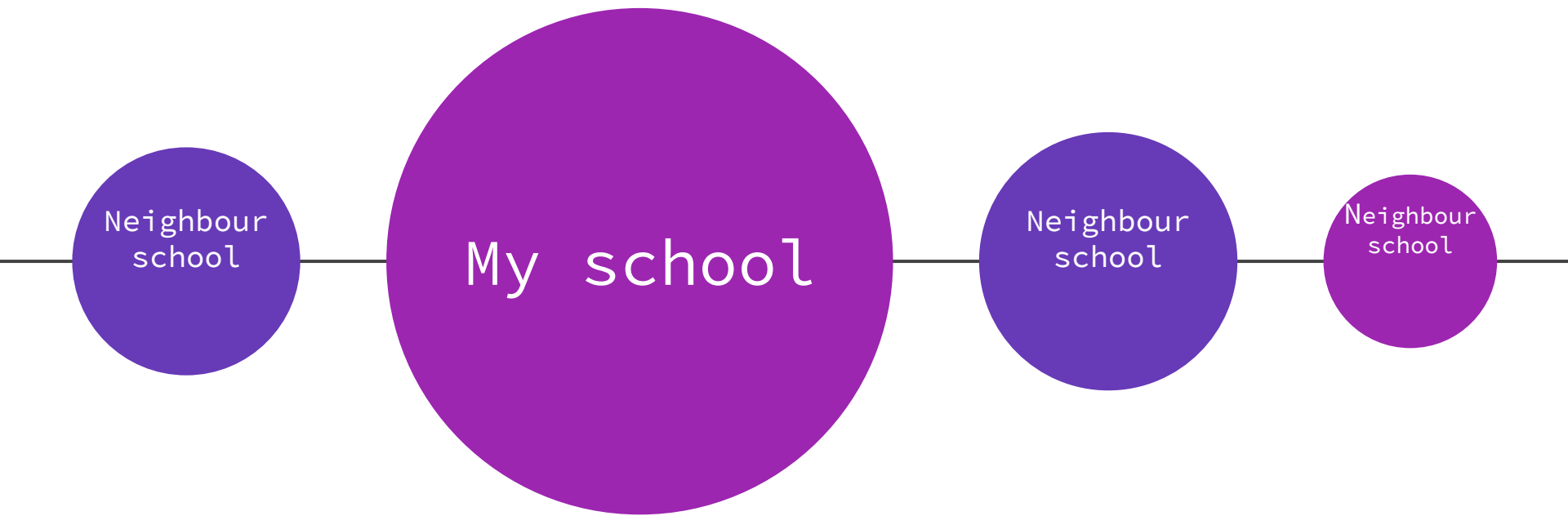
**Not one of us is as
effective as ALL of us!**

Janine Devenport - Sabbatical study 2016

Study

How primary schools can collaborate to provide high quality learning and professional development opportunities across clusters or communities?

The picture of primary school education



The picture:

The current picture shows a number of schools working hard to develop authentic education opportunities for the students in their school.

They are however very siloed and there is still a lot of competition between schools. This is due to a number of factors.

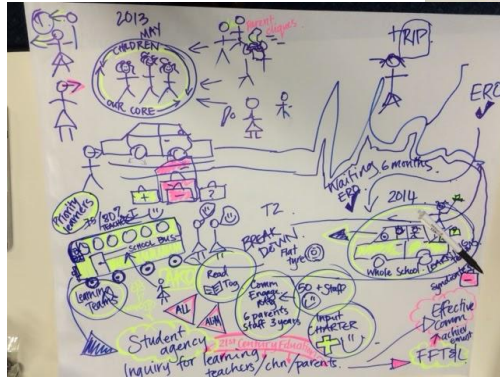
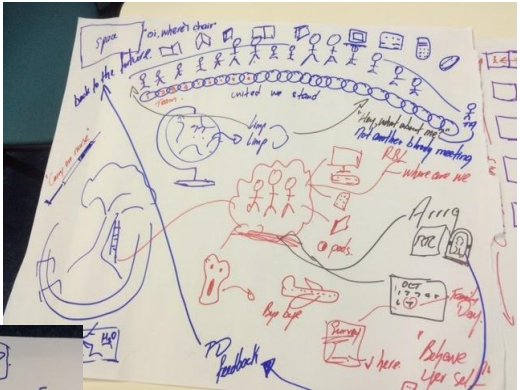
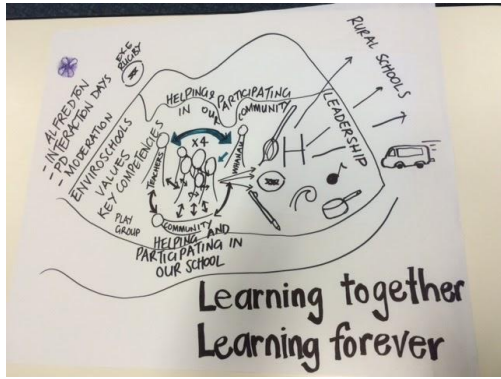
- The funding system for schools - including the salary of staff
- Perception of the community about what is a good school?
- Deciles
- Lack of communication between school cluster due to past differences etc
- Past network reviews or mergers
- A focus on only the children in my school rather than a collective responsible for the achievement and welfare of all students of the community.
- There is still blame evident - e.g “oh they came from that school!”

The Masterton Primary Principal's cluster has been working together and learning together so that we can benefit ALL the children of Masterton.

This has been a process of internal reflection and lots of work and this interested me and I was keen to hear about other clusters and their work in this area.

I believe that working collaboratively is beneficial to all - not just the students but the educators too.

Why study collaboration?



We began with Learning Maps

Our Key mode



SPIRALS OF INQUIRY:

This is the model that we used for our year of learning - We spent lots of time at the scanning and focusing stage! Sometimes we felt like this was too much time and that we were not getting anywhere.

NEXT STEPS for developing common needs based goals:

- what information is still needed?
- Whose perspectives might still need to be considered - if any
- What are the relationships within and across the organisations that need to be taken into account - or that might contribute to the solutions?

BACKGROUND

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS RECENTLY BEEN AN ADVOCATE FOR COLLABORATION ACROSS SCHOOLS THROUGH THEIR COMMUNITIES OF SCHOOLS/LEARNING CONCEPTS.

AFTER A LOT OF READING AND TALKING WITH A NUMBER OF SOURCES THIS MODEL - EVEN THOUGH NOT COMPLETELY FINALISED, IS BEGINNING TO BE THE ONE MODEL FOR DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTRY.

WHILE IN ESSENCE THIS HAS GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING OF STUDENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS, IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS.

A KEY COMPONENT OF MY STUDY WILL BE TO ASK KEY QUESTIONS OF THE CLUSTERS THAT ARE UP AND RUNNING - (WHETHER THEY ARE C.O.L OR NOT) - WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND BARRIERS TO RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE CLUSTER - AND MOST IMPORTANTLY WHAT ARE THE KEY BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR LEARNING.

Thank you

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I would like to thank the key people involved in this study. Firstly thank you to the Board of Trustees of Fernridge School Masterton who have always been very supportive of my professional learning and development. I would also like to thank the staff of Fernridge School who supported me to go on this journey.

I would also like to Thank the key leaders and school personnel who I picked their brains. They gave up their time to talk with me and share their insights about this study, which we all know is a challenge in the busy and multi faceted lives of school leadership.

My key questions!

These were the questions that I used to ask the school leaders and other professionals regarding collaboration

1. In your own words what does Collaboration mean to you?
 2. What does collaboration look like in your cluster? Who does it include/exclude? Why?
 3. What was the catalyst for you and your cluster to collaborate?
 4. What were the barriers that you encountered?
 5. If you could start again would you change the way that you did it?
 6. What are the key benefits of collaboration?
 7. How do you know it is working successfully?
 8. Who benefits the most from collaboration across schools? Students or teachers?
 9. Where to next?
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School Leaders

I had the pleasure of meeting with a number of school leaders from the local area and further afield.

I would like to thank these school leaders for giving me their time. I visited schools that were in clusters but not in a Community of Learning, Schools that were thinking about Communities of learning and schools that were fully immersed in the Communities of learning.

John Channer - Upper Hutt

Ariana Tyson - NaeNae Intermediate

Anne Marie Gordon - Normandale

Sarah Wiki Bennet - Kirwee Model

Jeanette Shearer - Isleworth School

Stu Devenport - South Makirikiri School



Findings:

1. In your own words what does Collaboration mean to you?

Thomas Kayser says:

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The Essence of Collaboration

The literal, sterile definition of collaboration is "to co-labor; to labor together." But that definition is too simple for our purposes. Over time, through many debates and discussions, I have evolved the following definition which has proven to be quite practical in my work with teams and organizations.

Collaboration is a joint effort between two or more people, free from hidden agendas, to produce an output in response to a common goal or shared priority. Often this output is greater than what any of the individuals could have produced working alone.

Collaboration works best when relationships are treated as genuine partnerships. That is, all parties are involved in creating superior new value together rather than merely performing one-for-one exchanges whereby a person simply gets something back for what is put in.

Collaboration is...

In your own words what does collaboration mean?

Working together for the greater good – accountability – good collaboration is about what does this mean for us? Not just to what does it mean for me? When you see something happen will you make a call to bring it out into the open. What are we keen to do – what are we all signed up to do? Collective understanding to get a shared vision.

Means a lot of things – across the school team teach across schools– school to school, taking the best of schools and letting them shine – maximise strengths and weaknesses, don't believe that you have to be collaborative all the time – have to have a sense of vulnerability – address the elephant in the room.

Working together – in a cluster across all areas and layers for a common cause to achieve set goals

Can you force collaboration? (interesting reading)

Posted on June 22, 2016 by John Spencer

So, it has me wondering, “Can you force collaboration in groups?”

Collaboration begins with trust and a shared vision for what you want to accomplish. Those are two things that you simply can't force on people. However, I've been a part of groups that were not self-selected and in the process of working together, we developed trust and eventually we shifted into a collaborative team. Yet, despite the group being “forced,” the collaboration remained voluntary. We hit that place where we wanted to work together.

In most cases, we started out as a cooperative group and we shifted into a collaborative group over time. Cooperative groups are more like networks built on respect and shared norms. The work shifts between independence and dependence where the members remain autonomous but agree to share information, tasks, and ideas. By contrast, a collaborative group is interdependent, with a shared vision and values. The mutual respect evolves into trust and the transparency eventually leads to vulnerability.

I've seen leaders who want to push groups into that place of collaboration but if it moves too quickly, things fall apart. Fake trust is worse than respect. Vulnerability without trust just feels risky. Interdependence can't happen when members haven't had the chance to explore roles and shared tasks.

Both Are Necessary

It's easy to look at the chart and assume that collaboration is better than cooperation. Part of that is my fault. The word "versus" implies an opposition. However, cooperation and collaboration should compliment each other — along with truly independent, autonomous work time.

There are some flaws to collaborative grouping. These groups tend to grow insular and fall into groupthink. Well-functioning teams can be too slow to change because they are already working so well together that they miss the fact that they aren't innovating. This kind of work can also be emotionally draining. Even in a healthy, functioning collaborative team, conflict can arise and it feels more personal because people know one another at a deeper level.

This is why cooperative grouping is vital. When using design thinking, I encourage collaborative grouping on certain projects. However, in each of the phases, I encourage members to move to other cooperative groups to provide feedback and share ideas. Groups will often meet with one another to look at their work from another angle. This shorter, networked style of interaction helps keep things fresh. It provides a positive disruption that pushes collaborative groups to think differently.

What does collaboration look like in your cluster?

This where there are a number of similarities across the clusters that I spoke to. Some were beginning their journeys and others were further down the road.

The Christchurch clusters had been forced together after the earthquake and most of these clusters had remained tight - they have had access to extra funding for learning community clusters and many have implemented projects that have provided professional learning and development for the teachers in their cluster. These LCC's have ranged from ICT techie breakies, to teaching writing and initially middle management development although this strand has now stopped.

The 2 north island clusters who were active have a history of working together to provide across school professional learning for teachers in the form of lead teacher groups, cluster conferences and plg's. One cluster utilised local trust monies while the other asked for a levy from each teacher - this small amount meant that they had a pool of money to utilise and support the professional learning. This money was usually spent on logistics rather than outside experts. They both had the belief that the knowledge was already present.

Some of the clusters that were just beginning to form into COL's were undecided about how this might look and were just in the initial stages.

It was pleasing to see that all schools and clusters were working hard despite the barriers.

Who is included/excluded?

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There was a range across clusters

Most had a pathway - primary and secondary

The south island schools included ECE but found that it was very easy to exclude them unintentionally when talking about National Standard or achievement data.

Another had primary and were investigating the pathways for both ECE and secondary. All clusters were geographically close.

A note from a collaboration expert

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“Using the Spirals of Inquiry Model”

Taking time to get the shared purpose is vital for the success of collaboration across clusters. Teachers instinctively want to get on with the job and moving into the action stage. If you rush through the initial stages then the work will fall over.

It is vital to gain trust, eliminate the competition across schools, downgrade the empire building philosophy and address the elephants in the room.

Most clusters are now working well with work happening in a range of models - the big thing is what next and how we move this from surface work of providing professional learning and development for teachers to getting into the deep stuff that involves all stakeholders of the community and real traction.

What was the catalyst to forming the cluster?

The Christchurch earthquake was a key event that formed the clusters in Christchurch. After this huge event the Ministry needed to rally and support schools. The Ministry used Geonet to group schools together and put the school leaders in a room and told them that this was going to happen. Of course this did not go down particularly well and there was some push back.

After some wriggling clusters were formed and after 4-5 years they are growing and developing stronger.

The Upper Hutt and Masterton clusters have been together voluntarily for a number of years - the catalyst for them could have been the network reviews that happened in the early 2000's. These groups have schools that make a conscious decision to work together and both have provided amazing opportunities for their students. These two clusters have not chosen to go into a formal COL at this stage.

The NaeNae and Lower Hutt clusters have also been groups that have worked together before in the past either through ICT clusters or literacy leadership. They are now forming into COL's.

Barriers

Can you force collaboration?

No you can't force it! – It made a difference that they worked together before – relationships are so important and addressing the elephant in room – possible school closures or achievement data-

Ego and rolls of schools I go to these meetings because I don't know so I listen or go because I do know then I share – there are many reluctant leaders. Veneer some that are good and genuinely good but some that gloss things over - reputation vs substance – It is hard to find the commonalities within the group as we don't know sometimes.

Money running out. A crystal ball might say that in 3 years there will be no money for cluster collaboration and so all the stuff that you have got up and running which is good, we will make schools do with no money or very little money. We are very good at asking teachers to do everything on a shoestring budget. Very slow - lack of impact for now – changing practice takes time – quick to criticise

The main essence from this was that it took time - and lots of it! Typically teachers want to move straight to the doing and sort out an action plan and fix the problem. The issue with that is if not everyone is on the same page then it becomes not a collaborative process but some doing stuff.

Barriers contd.

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The other barriers that came to light were of groups being formed by others - e.g. local ministry or geonet. In these instances it was being done to them and there was some ill feeling. Working to get the common goal - vision values and addressing the WHY! Needs to be worked through so that there is sustainability.

In my view - there are many clusters out there who are collaborating and working together to raise student achievement and to do the best for the children in their communities but it tends to stop at one level. Again I feel that this a level where things and groups are working together - they are providing and participating in PD and the work is there to support students but then it tends to stop - WHERE to next is tricky but no one is there.

If you could start again - what would you do differently?

1. Get a facilitator on board earlier – we were doing a lot – plg for every curriculum – but now have rationalise them The ones that we run – we support – SENCO ICT Cultural leaders Middle leaders and junior teachers self supporting can be run independently

Biggest mistake – elected to use infinity maps – Brian Annan learning maps

As a tool – was it valuable – solution lies within the room –

Teacher only day in the holidays – twilight sessions

It's not about experts

Executive planning group with a co-ordinator

Cluster wide teacher only day during school time – deprivatizing teacher practice

Tight board chair cluster – reported to board chairs about cluster vision and goals

The money \$250 shows intent

Have meetings at the school of the not fully adopted.

1. I would not assume that people have the same beliefs that I did – there are lots of Empire building out there and this shocked me as I thought that everyone has the same vision/goal for education.

Who benefits the most? Teachers or students?

1. Teachers at this point of time – Uplift the people we serve by uplifting the people that serve them. Trickle down with respect. Teachers are treated badly by a number of agencies and parents in their hearts of hearts they are there doing their best for the children in their rooms. If we give them respect and treat them well then it will benefit the students.
1. *Hmmm, probably more teachers at this point. I think in most cases, they just about always benefit before students. However in saying this, some kids would have seen big changes in their classes partly supported by what is happening as a result of the project. But there are some teachers who are a little slower to shift their practice.*

Indirectly the students – teachers are developing their PD and practice. Principal support – strong collegial support –

This is interesting to me and shows me that we must start with the teachers and then the benefits will come for the students - The Ministry, Government and ERO of course would like to see direct results in student achievement. I believe that these will come but the starting point is based around teachers - what we need to ensure is that it doesn't just stay with teachers and that there is no benefit to students.

So is there a road map...?

These clusters have all stepped up and moved forward and embraced the cluster collaboration. Many have used their wisdom and expertise to lead the set the direction for the group.

The key points for success that I can see are

- Making sure that everyone is involved and not just there but involved
- Taking time to get your vision and values right - don't rush in - think seriously about the WHY! Educators are all so busy that you don't need to add to stress and workload without out knowing and understanding what the benefits are
- Keep checking in... Support, encourage, cooperate and collaborate
- Use a model - e.g. spirals
- Once you have the plan then make sure that it happens
- Start from the bottom up - If it comes from the students then it will be sustainable. If it is dependant on one person or expert then it will fall over and/or stop as soon as that person/leader leaves.
- Stay positive even in the pit
-



"The most valuable resource
that all teachers have is each
other. Without collaboration
our growth is limited to our
own perspectives."

- Robert John Meehan



