



LIN DIXON: SABBATICAL REPORT

- as researched while on leave from Hokowhitu School in Term 2 2016.

To explore pedagogies and practice that support effective personalised learning in both flexible learning spaces (MLE) and single cell classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I sincerely wish to acknowledge the Hokowhitu School Board of Trustees for supporting my application. My special thanks to the staff of Hokowhitu School who have supported one another in my absence, with particular thanks to Sam Bradnock who has effectively filled the role of Acting Principal over the term.

Special thanks also go to the following schools who willingly shared their time, practice, thoughts and pedagogy with me:

Bulls School and Whakarongo School (Manawatu/Rangitikei)

Waipahihi School and Taupo Primary (Taupo),

Te Kowhai School, Te Uku School, Te Mata School and Hamilton East School (Hamilton/Raglan).

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance and collegial discussion and learning provided by Anne Giles who helped set up many of the visits and accompanied me to those schools. This provided me with a 'reflective sounding board' for what we had seen.

Having the time to read, reflect and consider the practical applications for our school has been welcomed. Thanks to MOE/NZEI/NZSTA for this highly valuable initiative for Principals.

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE:

- ✚ The New Zealand Curriculum clearly visions an education that develops learners that are confident, connected, actively involved, life long learners.
- ✚ The world and workforce that today's youngest learners will enter as adults will be vastly different from now - 'What are we doing to help our students develop the skills necessary to handle a world of fundamental uncertainty?' Ian Jukes.
- ✚ Increasingly, we are learning that pedagogies that develop skills such as: complex communication, creativity/innovation/fluency with information and media, problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration need to be fostered and developing.
- ✚ To explore practical ways to 'personalise' learning in a way that makes it purposeful, enjoyable and authentic to the individual when they are all so unique.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- The way each of us learns is completely unique. No two learners bring the identical prior knowledge to a learning experience and neither do they learn in the identical way.
- Learning that is initiated by the learners themselves typically results in greater learning (Ramey and Ramey, 2004). Learner 'agency' or choice is a vital step to this.
- Building learners motivation and self -efficacy are two key factors in both success and engagement in the classroom. (Suzy Pepper Rollins - Learning in the Fast Lane)
- Relationships are crucial. This is not just teacher - student, but peer relationships too. Creating a powerful classroom culture is essential. This requires developing a learning community within the learning space - training the learners in effective group discussion and problem solving techniques. (Nuthall 2007)
- It is not enough to simply engage learners, they need to be very clear about what they are learning to do - standards and goals must be explicit, clear and achievable within a reasonable time frame. (Suzy Pepper Rollins - Learning in the Fast Lane)
- Teacher collaboration is much more than sharing resources, anecdotes and even own beliefs. Collaboration needs to focus on the evidence of impact and common understandings about the incremental changes needed to maximise impact in each context. (Hattie June 2015)
- An atmosphere of 'trust' needs to pervade, as does a 'growth mindset' for all within the learning community.

FINDINGS

What is personalised learning?

'Personalised learning is putting the learner at the heart of the education system' (Leadbetter 2008).

"Personalised learning is learning that is initiated by students themselves; typically when a student initiates a learning experience or exploration, they learn more." (Ramey and Ramey, 2004)

(Bates 2014; Williams, 2013) The ultimate aim of a personalised learning environment is to create an educational system that responds directly to the diverse needs of individuals rather than imposing a 'one size fits all' model on students.

Schools of the 20th Century had all learners facing the same way - looking directly at the teacher who was the fountain of all knowledge. Mostly the learners all received the same information, whether or not they already knew it, or indeed had no use or relevance to the learning (as it was not the next piece of the jigsaw that they needed).

Graeme Nuthall's research found that on average, students already know approximately 50% of the content the teacher intended 'teaching' before they start. Of course, different students know different things, but this means approximately 20% already know what the teacher is trying to teach, 50% know something about it, and approximately 20% know nothing about it.

One school I have visited gives students licence to 'remove themselves from the direct instruction' if they know it is not meeting their current learning needs. This is a practical element of personalising learning that I would like to further explore.

What does a personalised learning environment look like?

Williams (2013) synthesized a body of work looking at personalised learning approaches and identified 6 essential key themes for an effective learning environment.

1. Locus of control: Shifting the ownership of learning towards the students
2. Knowing students as learners: Educators knowing the attainment and levels of each learner.
3. Student engagement: Connecting to the lives and aspirations of the learner through authentic activities. This provides purpose and motivation to gain new skills and knowledge.
4. Collaboration: Fostering a culture where the learners see themselves as both contributors and participants to the learning process.
5. Effective use of ICT: Providing the infrastructure to support AND a platform to deliver personalised learning activities and resources to learners. The technology allows for anytime, anywhere learning.
6. Classroom culture: Effective relationships between all the learners in the environment.

Bray and McClusky (2012) define the significant difference between individualisation, differentiation and personalisation as both differentiation and individualisation being teacher centred and personalisation being learner centred.

What personalised learning did I see on school visits?

All the schools I visited knew I was exploring personalised learning. What this looked like in each of their settings varied considerably.

Some schools focussed on learner agency - from giving choice around entering workshops/learning activities, to the order in which tasks were to be completed, 'can do's and must do's, choice around the format of the outcome of the learning, the right to self assess (and provide evidence) mastery of a learning goal, the choice to do their learning through passions, choice around the physical space they worked in, whether they worked collaboratively or independently, ways to seek support for their learning etc.

A school operating completely in ILE (innovative learning environments) speaks clearly of the power of collaborative teaching and the collective wisdom that multiple perspectives bring. They are finding that multiple perspectives and greater teacher/student connections provide a much deeper/richer perspective for each learner. Their learning programme is strongly student directed.

One aspect of this school's very strong collaborative vision is to have one teacher follow the learners' through into the next year level. This means the children start their new year with at least one of the teachers already having knowledge and connections that can be built on and shared with the rest of the teaching team. This is something that I will be closely considering for our school as I am also very keen to avoid the 'silo effect' of each collaborative teaching team, staying with the same year level year after year.

One school has introduced a reception class for their New Entrants. Each child has their own set of skills to master. They are visible on the wall in the room. The children then transition through to the Year 1 ILE in small groups (there is not a specific time frame for the skill development), it is entirely based on the individual's 'readiness'.

Others focused on every child have individual learning goals and individualised success criteria (established 1:1 with the child). Individually conferencing learners and encouraging them to discuss their progress and show their evidence was an important factor right across the school. One school described this as the quality of time, and described the relationship this gave children with their teacher as a worthwhile investment.

Visibly identifying where learners are 'at' had emphasis in several of the schools. One school had the child's current learning goal and success criteria on the wall in a plastic sleeve (for easy identification and update purposes). Another school had the children's name (or photo) blue tacked onto a sheet identifying their current level - this was in the teacher's workroom, not in the main area of the learning space.

One of the culturally diverse schools visited had a very practical way of ensuring every child could easily be identified and correctly named in every classroom of the school. On the wall in each room there was a clear photo and brief caption including their name and ethnic identity, or one interesting fact about them. As a brief visitor to the room, even I could easily make a personal connection with any of the learners, after a quick glance at the photo and caption.

ICT usage varied considerably across the range of schools. While some had only a modest number of devices in each room, others had either a generous amount, or in some cases 1:1 availability. From my perspective IT devices can be highly powerful learning tools when used effectively. Agentic learners have every piece of knowledge they need literally 'at their fingertips' when they know how to efficiently access and make meaning from what they see. Devices can also be little more than engaging 'time fillers' if used 'like a worksheet'. Nuthall (2007). 'Learning requires motivation, but motivation does not necessarily lead to learning'.

One school enthusiastically shared a new literacy intervention programme they are now using instead of reading recovery. They are very pleased with the outcomes for learners struggling with reading success. The coded based reading programme (method) focusing heavily on the structure of language is proving to be effective and efficient for them.

What I learnt from research/reading about Personalised Learning

Leaders and teachers need to know their children REALLY well. This includes both on a personal level and also knowing clearly and specifically what each learner can or cannot do.

Professor John Hattie (2003) believes it is vital that learners have the information required (or are given effective feedback) in order to answer the following questions.

- Where am I going?
- How am I going?
- Where to next?

The relationship between all the learners (teacher/student, student/student, teacher/teacher) is one of the most important factors in contributing to improved outcomes for the student.

In 'The Hidden Lives of Learners', Nuthall (2007) outlines his beliefs of the vital underlying principles of effective teaching.

1. Students learn what they do. In simple terms, this means if you see them copying notes that is what they are learning, to copy.
2. Social relationships determine learning. The peer culture is extremely strong. Teachers need to know about individual's friendship groups, who has status, who wants to be liked by whom, their beliefs and culture.
3. Effective activities are built around big questions. To expect engaged, focused learning behaviour the outcomes of the learning activities need to be really important, both in the curriculum and the lives and interests of the learner.
4. Effective activities are managed by the students themselves. Characteristics include
 - Rich tasks (big ideas that are significant to the learners)
 - Engage the learners by being broken down into smaller linked problems
 - Provides teachers with the opportunity to monitor individual learners' evolving understandings
 - Allows the learners (with experience) to manage their learning.

Personalising learning for our Māori students may benefit from more specific understandings drawn from the work of Berryman, Glynn, Walker, Reweti, O'Brian, Boasa-Dean, Glynn, Langdon and Weiss (2002), Berryman (2014) and Bishop, Ladwig and Berryman (2014).

Manaakitanga describes the immediate responsibility and authority of the host to care for their visitor's emotional, spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing.

Whanaungatanga describes the centrality of extended family-like relationship and the 'rights and responsibilities, commitments and obligations, and supports that are fundamental to the collectivity'.

New Zealand evidence suggest that whanaungatanga, while not sufficient, is 'foundational and necessary for effectively teaching Māori students.....as Whanaungatanga increases, the probability of high cognitive demand increases... and when the level of whanaungatanga was mid-range or higher, the lowest levels of engagement disappeared'. (Bishop, Ladwig, and Berryman, 2014, Pg 28).

Ako describes a teaching and learning relationship - a 2 way process and the participants are connected to one another.

Mahi tahi refers to working together as a group in a 'hands on' fashion. Collaborating.

Derek Wenmoth (Core Education) states

The characteristics of modern learning practice (MLP) are likely to include:

- learners having greater agency in their learning, able to navigate their pathways in ways that are appropriate to them
- greater evidence of collaboration among and between students, among and between teachers, and between students and teachers
- teachers working collaboratively with larger numbers of students, ensuring the needs of particular groups and individuals are being met while others are working in self directed groups etc.
- greater focus on self directed learning, including emphasis on learners taking more responsibility for accumulating evidence of their learning for assessment purposes.

While neither Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers or Derek Wenmoth's description of modern learning practice refer specifically to 'Personalised Learning', I believe they both describe effective practice for personalising learning.

In 'Learning in the Fast Lane' Suzy Pepper Rollins details many practical tools to give the learner greater responsibility by providing them with valuable work. Rollins states that to get low achieving learners to willingly engage and contribute to their learning, teachers need to structure their work thoughtfully and consistently engage them academically too.

Shearer, Ruddell, and Vogt (2001) state that students who are struggling academically tend to get highly structured lessons that offer few opportunities for creativity or interaction with other students.

Rollins describes exciting 'student work sessions' where the teacher delivers a compelling opener, and then leads a mini-lesson to model, explain and deliver the information students need to be able to engage in their assigned work during the rest of the period.

She details strategies such as cooperative learning quadrants, jigsaws, learning stations, and menus as effective tools when the teacher ensures that any combination of the tasks the learners choose will enable them to meet the learning objective. It is not sufficient for the task to just be captivating.

Rollins continues discussing the power of scaffolding. Introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), scaffolding is a process that allows the learner to perform tasks that would be too difficult for them to complete without assistance.

Rollins details effective scaffolding tools - many that can be planned or produced before the lesson begins, Standards walls, key vocabulary, devices such as cheat sheets, graphic organisers, checklists and bookmarks, flowcharts, 'almost there' writing and checklists. Practical strategies discussed include think alouds, reciprocal teaching and visible thinking. Rollins likens a learner's gaps (in knowledge or skills) to a ship with a few holes. 'She argues it is our job to fix the holes while the ship continues to sail. Scaffolding allows the learner to keep moving forward - to learn today's lesson even if they didn't get everything in the past.

If a lower-achieving learner's learning can be personalised in some of the ways Rollins describes, it will give them success and therefore is likely to increase their self confidence and motivation.

The OECD Educational Research and Innovation report 'Innovative Learning Environments' state that that to be their most effective, innovative learning environments should

- make learning and engagement critical
- ensure that learning is social and often collaborative
- be highly attuned to learner motivations and emotions
- be acutely sensitive to individual differences
- be demanding for each learner but without excess overload
- use assessments consistent with learning aims, with strong emphasis on formative feedback
- promote horizontal connectedness across activities and subjects, in and out of school

What does my learning mean for the pedagogical foundation/direction for Hokowhitu School?

I have read/explored the work and research of many respected NZ and international educators. While perspectives and experiences vary, there is a considerable alignment with the findings.

With flexible learning spaces developed in most areas of our school (and plans to be school-wide), we have much of the pedagogy and physical environments in place.

Our next steps include:

- ensuring we know our learners 'deeply' and this includes their peer relationships, passions and motivations
- establishing teacher/learner relationships for an extended period of time (more than one year where possible)
- collaborating to ensure tasks are rich and meaningful to the learner
- further developing the learner agency - learners developing the ability to accumulate evidence of their learning. Learners becoming co-producers of their learning pathway
- ensuring that our programmes put all learners on the road to academic success with high expectations and appropriate support
- ensuring that the assessment/monitoring is effectively used for new learning
- collectively establish a clear set of principles for learners at Hokowhitu School (thanks to Tony Grey, Te Kowhai school for sharing their principles)

http://thequohaslostitsstatus.weebly.com/uploads/5/4/2/3/54231535/tekowhaikeyprinciplesbeliefse-learning__1_.pdf

Other considerations: (for collective discussion/reflection)

Do we need a junior and senior team? Could each kete serve as their own learning community?

The NE/Y1's can be doing lots of this collaboration in single cell rooms. How do we best progress this?

In conclusion, personalising learning requires:

- strong relationships and culture (connecting across the child's whole life)
- deep knowledge of the learner to make learning and engagement critical. What makes

that child's tyres smoke?

- lots of opportunity for collaboration and social connections
- challenges for the learner but not 'overloaded and bogged down'
- formative feedback, based on assessments consistent with the learning aims
- opportunities for self directed learning, with the learner taking responsibility for accumulating evidence of their learning

What an exciting prospect for educators and children. A great way to develop citizens that are confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners.

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