

PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL REPORT TERM 2, 2016

Judy Nicoll
Principal
Makauri School
120 King Rd. RD1
Gisborne 4071

INNOVATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Purposes of the Sabbatical

Through research and school visits, identify the practices / success factors which enable schools to transition from traditional classrooms to an ILE environment.

Identify how teachers and students can be prepared and then supported in the move from the traditional role to a more collaborative classroom.

Develop a framework or guidelines for my own school for the transition to an Innovative Learning Environment.

Makauri School

Makauri is a school of eight classrooms situated on the outskirts of Gisborne City. The site is shared with Makauri Rural Kindergarten. It is an idyllic setting, with a supportive Board and Community. The School's current 10 Year Property Plan includes some development into innovative learning spaces.



Alongwith schools across NZ, we have started to explore what the implications of moving from the traditional eight classrooms to open classroom spaces might look like, sound like, feel like. Hence the questions around preparation of teachers and students, and the need for that journey to get started.

Definitions

It was important initially to define what was meant by a 'Modern Learning Environment'.

The ever-changing jargon over past years has not been helpful.

The Jargon

Modern Learning Environments - MLE

Flexible Learning Spaces/Environments - FLS / FLE

Innovative Learning Environments or Space - ILE / ILS

Modern/Innovative Learning Practice - MLP / ILP

And even ... Flexible and Responsive Environments for Deep Learning - FREDL

I will use throughout this Report the term 'Innovative Learning Environments' based on the following statement from the NZ Ministry of Education website.

"In the past the term 'Modern Learning Environments' (MLE) was used. "Innovative Learning Environments" (ILE) has greater international recognition, and is used by the Ministry of Education. This is consistent with both international usage and growing discomfort in New Zealand with the term MLE".

What is an Innovative Learning Environment?

Innovative learning environments support strengths-based teaching. They offer students and teachers flexibility, openness, and access to resources. Working in an open, flexible learning environment where inquiries are shared, interventions devised collaboratively, and reflections based on both self and peer observations, leads to a more robust, continuously improving community of practice. It offers students and teachers flexibility, agency, ubiquity and connectedness. An innovative environment is one that is capable of evolving and adapting as educational practices evolve and change - thus remaining future focused. [Source](#)

What is an innovative Learning Space?

“Physical spaces are only a part of the contribution to an innovative learning environment. 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, distance learning contexts, libraries, tutoring centres, teachers’ staffrooms, gymnasiums, and the interaction between these spaces”. [Source](#)

2015 - A starting point.

The above definitions were revelatory in examining my own school’s ILE journey. While the Innovative Learning Space - ILS, is a critical factor towards success, it is was not the focus of this study.

The Sabbatical focus was to develop my knowledge and understandings of Innovative Learning Environments, and what aspects of current teaching and learning practice could be used to launch into new ways of being. In other words what was the road map from the known to the unknown? Self review was to be critical to the success of moving into the environment of innovative learning.

Against the above definitions from the Ministry of Education current practices were identified.

Our review question identified what aspects of current practice reflected contemporary, future-focused pedagogy.

Further, we wanted to gain understandings around how the school could prepare, grow and support the most effective pedagogical and systemic approaches to teaching and learning compatible with an Innovative Learning Environment.



From self review:

- Pedagogy informs our practice in key learning areas.
- Close links with onsite Kindergarten. Transition to school programme for learning coherence.
- A culture of effective interrelationships exists within school staff.
- Teachers are committed to professional learning and development, including university studies.
- Core Education’s Webinar Series on Modern Learning Practice undertaken in 2015 (5 teachers)
- Three teachers (two full-time and one part-time) working across two classrooms of 55 Year 5 & 6 students. (Small beginnings).
- We have our own Teaching as Inquiry model. Inquiries into practice are shared.
- Performance Appraisal includes multiple perspectives - reflections by self, peer, school leaders.
- Some collaboration to discuss assessment data to informs next steps teaching and learning.
- Some Interventions for individuals and groups devised collaboratively.

This was a powerful list of current practice to take forward. We were moving towards being future-focused within our traditional one teacher, one classroom framework.

2016 - Sabbatical Focus

What was missing? What were the next steps towards ILE? A world of possibilities.

- Learning from the past, from others, from research / literature.
- Developing pedagogical knowledge to new levels.
- Agreement on defining 'collaboration' Practising collaborative conversations.
- Developing a sense of collective responsibility.
- Flexibility of mindset. Open to being further 'future-focused' - embracing the waves of change.
- Truly 'joint work' - where teachers plan, teach, and inquire into teaching together.
- Using strengths based teaching. Co-teaching. Collaborative team teaching and learning.
- A focus on empowering the Learner. Strengthening Learner Agency. Student Voice.
- Empowering the parent community about changes in education, teaching and learning.
- Connectedness. Connections with learning outside the school. Bringing others into the school.
- ILE resourcing, both physical and digital. / BYOD / resource management.
- Ubiquity - identifying spaces for learning opportunities anywhere, any time.
- True coherence across learning areas and ILE Teams.

The above list is extensive and can be viewed as the endpoint of the journey. Where the starting point is, can only be determined by each school or team of teachers. Effective leadership is key to ILE success. It is timely to constantly remind ourselves that innovative learning environments are aspirational and multi-faceted. We are all on the continuum of the various components, aspiring to keep moving forward.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest **a continuum of collaboration** from, "scanning and storytelling, (exchange of ideas, anecdotes and gossip), to help and assistance, to sharing (of materials and teaching strategies), to joint work where teachers teach, plan or inquire into teaching together."

This was great advice. We were moving from 'scanning and storytelling' to a middle ground of journeying and growth.

First things first!

Pedagogical Leadership was identified by **Viviane Robinson (2007)** as the most likely form of leadership to impact student learning outcomes. The five 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 so that teachers and students can focus on teaching and learning.

New Learning

All principals and teachers I have discussed ILE with, put relationships at the top of the tree, so to speak, validating Viviane Robinson's research for '**the need for positive relationship skills**'. ILEs are about people more than about buildings. They are about creating a school culture where people are empowered to be the best they can be. Building staff relationships is paramount to any move to the Innovative Learning Environment. Staff relationships are foundational. In developing a framework to take the school further towards being an ILE School, it is the people and the relationships between these people that is the keystone of success.

Developing a sense of collective responsibility for all students is a must. '**Our students, not my students**'. Leadership that plans deliberate acts of collaborative conversation; Leadership that engenders flexible mindsets through professional learning and development; Leadership that values

disruption to embrace the emerging waves of change. School Leaders, Teachers, students and communities need time before being hurled into a changed learning space. Time to review current practice and time to prepare for monumental change.

Support for Staff every step of the way is critical to success. While in-school support is critical, e.g. further release time to dialogue the ways and means of collaborating, support can also come from other schools and online sources. In-school time to come together will enable **the development of shared beliefs and understandings** about organisation, curriculum, co-teaching strategies, learner agency, etc.

Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter abound in queries, suggestions and resource sharing. [ILE & Collaborative Teaching NZ](#) is one such Facebook site. Another useful platform is the [NZ Virtual Learning Network Group](#) 'Exploring the intersection of pedagogy, curriculum, technology and space'. The emerging **Communities of Learning** have the potential to formalise in-school and between-school collaboration for teachers as they journey along the continuum of ILE.

Systems for team communication need consideration. How will the team dialogue, plan, evaluate and review as a collective? Systems for students, systems around spaces, timetables, etc., are only the beginning. Learning new systems or integrating known systems into the new, are ongoing challenges.

Professional Learning and Development is a given. Identifying the skills of working collaboratively and how the school might establish a protocol or covenant for working together, could be a starting point. Prioritising collective PLD needs around the multitude of aspects of ILE will need expert strategic planning.

The art of co-teaching is an important, first step, a PLD opportunity. What is co-teaching? What does co-teaching look like, sound like, feel like. What models of co-teaching are there?

Supportive Teaching - where one takes the lead in teaching and the other floats in support; **Parallel Teaching** - where two or more work with different groups of students at the same time in different parts of the room; **Complimentary Teaching** - where co-teachers do something to enhance the teaching of their colleague; **Team Teaching** - where 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)

Co-teaching is an aspect of ILE that many teachers report as a positive. The positive aspects are shared planning, assessment and evaluation tools. Sometimes co-teaching engenders more planning, at other time less planning. Systems over time do develop. Teachers I have spoken to enjoy observing each other, getting feedback from each other, whether parallel teaching, complementary teaching or team teaching. Teachers enjoy 'sharing' student learning. Multiple teachers, multiple perspectives to bring to the learner.

Appraisal systems can be enhanced with teachers adding a collegial perspective to the Practising Teacher Criteria. Honest exploration of teacher strengths and weaknesses can take place in an open and supportive environment. Teachers are learning in connectedness **with, from and among colleagues**. In fact, teachers are providing their own professional learning alongside growing leadership capacity.

The following is a list of some factors for journeying towards success in the ILE. These are gleaned from readings, school visits, discussions with school leaders and teachers. These have and will form the basis for developing a framework of actions for my own school for the transition to an Innovative Learning Environment; a framework co-constructed with school staff, students and community.

For School Leaders / Teachers - Success Factors

- Focus on the strength and school culture. Is it open to change?
- Create a collaborative environment that supports the introduction of ILE.
- Establish a protocol for working collaboratively. Build relationships
- Begin to develop a vision and strategic plan for the introduction of ILE.
- Think and talk 'Our students, not 'My students'.
- Start small. Trial with a pilot year group.
- Have a selection process for creating teaching teams. Distribute responsibilities.
- Create induction processes for moving into an ILE.
- Resource generously to get underway - e.g. more release time for co-ordinated planning.
- Build in time to read, reflect, research.
- Plan deliberate collaborative conversations.
- Plan time for all involved to visit other schools.
- Develop a tolerance for problems / conflicts. Allow time for un-learning and re-learning.
- Be adaptable. Have enthusiasm for the ability to change course when necessary.
- Maintain positivity. Be flexible. Be adaptable. Be open to all possibilities. Celebrate success.
- Work consistently on communication between team members. Systems development.
- Build networks with your parents / whanau. Be culturally responsive.
- Building Teaching as Inquiry practice. Share inquiries.
- Develop networks with Leaders and Teachers in other schools.

Planning for Learners - Success Factors

- Establish a protocol for collaborative conversations. Build relationships.
- Engaging parents and whanau.
- Modify your traditional classroom. Involve students.
- Consider how students learn best. Consult research.
- Re-think learning. Re-think teaching.
- Curriculum design for teaching and learning. Co-teaching.
- Planning for strengths based teaching.
- Integrating learning areas for coherence.
- Collaborative conversations around sharing assessment data.
- Truly know your learners' needs. Collaborative Needs Analysis.
- Embrace new ways of planning and evaluating collaboratively. Tools and approaches.
- Planning flexible learning approaches. e.g. Flexible grouping. Self selected grouping.
- Changing role of the teacher. Explore co-teaching options.
- Learner Agency - student voice, ownership & reflection on their learning.
- Place of technology in making learning ubiquitous (anywhere, anytime...)
- Student Led Conferencing - students reporting their own learning. Reporting in new ways.
- Future focused learning, continuously evolving and adapting.
- Creating an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment.

For learners too, relationships matter. To be successful in strengthening student progress, the **relationship between the teacher and learners** is critical to the underlying goal of learning to learn. Students need to understand their new roles and responsibilities as much as the teacher. Students will need to learn to learn from many teachers and need to embrace new organisations, systems, spaces and ways of learning. The Key Competencies of the NZ Curriculum come to the foreground in the ILE world. The KCs of Self Management, Thinking, Relating to Others, Participating and Contributing and Using language, symbols and texts underpin teaching and learning in the ILE world. (As do the Vision and Principles of NZC). Learners take a parallel journey with their 'learner-teachers' to become self

regulating agents of their own learning. Developing learner confidence through student voice is an important pedagogy of the ILE, extending to co-constructing their own learning in time.

The more haste, the less speed.

Capricious action, or too much haste to change with little foundational planning, has the potential to result in failure. Travel slowly. Remember it's a continuum! Practise what we preach! Assess, review, what do we already do well, what do we need to learn, what are first steps, our next steps? Action plan for success. Building adaptive capability is a journey. Give permission to explore, engage, enable, collaborate, innovate, design and redesign etc. Have tolerance for failure or 'the implementation dip'. "I've failed over and over and over again, that is why I succeed". *Michael Jordan*.

Moving Forward in your ILE

A useful planning and review tool is the [CORE Education Planning Matrix](#) which provides a starting point for planning, as well as review around decision making from educative purpose (establishing 'The Why') through to evaluative review. Following the Matrix are a series of questions on the measures to use to assess how well your ILE is suited to supporting learning in the 21st century. These are:

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

Conclusion.

ILE is a changing education landscape of new ways of being. In Alvin Toffler's much quoted words, we need to 'learn, unlearn and relearn' in our journey towards being an innovative learning environment.

Taking time to truly **review** what current 'future focused' practices and pedagogies already exist in the school, is the foundation on which to move into an innovative learning environment. Create your **vision, strategic plan, support and mentor** teachers and learners on this journey. Build capability and confidence through valuing **the collective voice** of all. ILE is **a continuum of collaboration**. Journey along the continuum at a pace informed by your own review.

Remember, the touchstone is always student achievement through teacher and learner capability, via repertoires of practices / pedagogies.

REFERENCES and a list of some of the useful ILE resources out there.

[CORE Education](#) A variety of professional learning options which give access to a huge range of resources. Makauri teachers completed the excellent [Modern Learning Practice](#) webinar series in 2015.

[Blog - Chris Bradbeer](#) Collaborative Teaching - what might it look like?

Core Education - A useful review and planning tool. [MLE CORE Ed Matrix](#)

CORE Ed - [MLEs Learning Spaces and Resourcing](#) from The Pond - a Webinar recording.

CORE ED Talks <http://edtalks.org> A variety of Core Ed Talks channels, including Modern Learning Environments; Ten Trends; New Pedagogies for Deep Learning; and more.

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Innovative Learning Environments, Change Management and much more.

[Google+](#) So many contributors. Just surf! Find your favourites to follow.

[Grow Waitaha](#) is a programme that supports schools through the process of change happening in Canterbury. Video resources.

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Judy Nicoll
Principal
Makauri School
Gisborne 4010

judy@makauri.school.nz
www.makauri.school.nz