

Maori Learners in Innovative Learning Environments.

Professional Learning Activity: Charles and Shona Oliver

- To research the difference that Innovative Learning Pedagogy makes to the achievement of priority learners with a particular focus on achievement of Maori learners.
- To visit other schools in New Zealand with established MLE's to discuss how this pedagogy has improved achievement outcomes for their Maori students.

Purpose of the Sabbatical:

The purpose of this application is to investigate the impact on Innovative Learning Pedagogy on the achievement of Maori students.

Does an Innovative Learning Environment accelerate the learning of this group of priority learners?

Rationale and Background Information:

At Wanganui Intermediate 35% of our students identify as Maori. Nearly 30% of them are below National Standard in Reading, 37% are below in Writing and 45% are below in Mathematics. This compares with 15% of European students who are below in Reading, 20% below in writing and 30% below in mathematics.

We have two Whanau classes and the remainder are in mainstream classes. Within the school we have four classes in an ILE with seven more class spaces in the pipeline.

At Central Normal school/ Te Kura Teauatahi o Papaioea we have 50% of our children identifying as Maori.

This includes both our six class bilingual team , Te Arawaru, and in our Kura Auraki (our mainstream). As a board of Trustees and a staff we have an absolute commitment to ensuring our Maori tamariki have success as Maori.

At a recent staff hui to discuss are we culturally responsive some of the key responses were....

- We have karakia every morning and afternoon
- Our school tikanga is firmly in place and followed
- We purposely plan throughout the year for learning experiences eg hangi, story of our awa, Matariki is celebrated across the school
- Teachers are learning te Reo
- Our school environment reflects our maori people
- Our Graduate Profiles sit in the heart of our foundation
- Whanaugatanga is the first , and most important, word in our WISE values
- Whanau hui are held throughout the year

All of our four teaching teams are now involved in ILEs.

As a school it is now an ideal time to stop and reflect on do these ILEs support our Maori children.

Preamble:

What did we do?

- We read material about Innovative Learning pedagogy, visited several amazing schools and met committed, hard working teachers who were led by Principals with a clear vision for their schools.
- All of this contributed to considerable reflection about collaboration and Innovative Learning Environments.

School Visits:

During the sabbatical we visited several schools in our local area and in the Bay of Plenty. Some schools were modern and were built with classroom buildings set up for innovative teaching practice while others were only modified in a minor way, dependent on the school's financial position.

Almost without exception we found that collaboration was between pairs of teachers. Even classroom blocks of four classrooms which would allow for groups of four were still working in pairs.

Teachers were often in teams of four but the collaboration was usually between two pairs of classes.

It made little difference how many or few classes were in a collaborative environment as the key to innovative teaching practice was the collaboration between the group. Teams of up to four teachers were engaged in group planning, reflection and assessment but the teaching was generally shared between pairs.

What did teachers say?

Teacher Practice

Through collaboration Teacher Practice is opened up. It enhances assessment accuracy and increases teaching transparency. Decisions around achievement are more accurate because more 'lenses' are focussed on the child.

Teachers are more responsive to students' learning needs and feedback and feedforward enhances students' own knowledge of their next learning steps.

In teacher practice there is a higher understanding of "Sharing the Load".

During our visits a common statement from teachers was that there was a great deal more quality student Agency. There was strong evidence of students understanding their learning steps.

Rich Conversations

Conversations between teachers have become more focussed and rich...

“Teachers meet about things that matter in classrooms.”

“4 ears, 4 eyes and two heads.”

Another theme was the need for teachers to be very organised when teaching in these environments.

Working closely in a collaborative environment requires higher levels of relational management because ILEs are a highly relational environment.

Management

Leadership involves more coaching with teaching teams than before. All of the Principals discussed the importance of this and their role in mentoring leaders.

Professional Meetings tended to be more tem focussed rather than whole staff.

Modern Teaching Structures

Through our conversations with Principals and teachers a common theme was the changed teaching structure rather than the physical environment.

Once collaboration was established achievement improved and formative assessment shared between teachers gave clear direction on the next learning steps. Prior to the schools setting up the shared teaching systems teachers tended to work in isolation.

The biggest impact on student achievement was teachers collaborating – this included sharing the planning, the teaching and the assessing. Teachers working closely together through collaborative practice ensured teachers developed explicit use of data and more coaching and mentoring happened.

It was acknowledged that the transition to this teaching is not always easy for all teachers.

“If I had a choice I would go back, but this is the best for the children.” – An older teacher.

Professional Development has evolved into more team based needs rather than whole staff.

Behaviour problems/challenges become less as teachers collaboratively solve these.

“This is best for the kids.” (An older teacher)

“Kids are getting a better shot at their learning.” (A Principal)

A) Students

- Children understand their learning and can define their next steps
- A good 'heart' to the children – the 'nurture wave' to each other
- In some schools tuakana teina well used
- Can select children to match teachers (of base class)
- A lot of foundation and discussions around 'what it means to be a good citizen' in an ILE
- High student agency
- Children needed to change too – (e.g. developing their social and emotional skills in a wider and bigger context)
- Had a 'down to business room' (quiet, focussed work and teaching area)

B) Teachers

- *More eyes, more ears, more heads – lead to richer conversations*
- Professional respect and trust is developed
- Cannot be in 'excuse' mode – as all is very transparent
- The deep, rich, everyday conversations teachers now have with each other
- Data driven – bigger data base than just one class
- Deliberate acts of teaching for a purpose
- Shared good practice and modelling
- Shared planning and teaching ideas
- Shared solutions to teaching and behaviour issues
- Teachers can demonstrate the teaching and learning to each other
- Need to be more organised in an ILE
- Have a richer, deeper picture of the children

C) General / 'Big Picture' Comments

- *It isn't the future, it is the now – e.g. businesses now have physical layouts like our ILEs*
- Enhances accuracy and increases transparency
- Decisions made are more accurate – as made through more lenses
- Teachers' practice is 'opened up'
- Sharing the burden – sharing the knowledge
- Collaboratively solving problems
- Focussed Professional Development planned for each individual group of teachers in an ILE. May differ from the ILE across the other side of the school.

Student Voice

Student Voice

A group of twenty (8 boys and 12 girls), Year 5 and 6 Māori/Pasifika pupils were surveyed after being in a developing ILE for one and two years. The Year 6 pupils were 'foundation' pupils in this environment. Until then they had all been in conventional classrooms. This was undertaken in a decile 4 school with 50% Māori students.

The questions asked of them were...

1. What is it that you like about being in The Hub?
2. Tell me about having 4 different teachers in a day... what is different about it?
3. How often do you work on your own? With one person? In a group?
4. What do you prefer (in 3 above), why?
5. What is good about working with others?
6. What is good about working on your own?
7. Do you think you work better in a room like The Hub? Why? ... or with one teacher?
8. What sort of learner are you? How do you know?
9. Are you that sort of learner all the time? Can you explain this?
10. When you were new in The Hub did other children help you settle in?
11. Do you think you are learning more in The Hub than you used to? Why?
12. What would you change?
13. Anything else you would like to tell me?

What they like about learning in an ILE

“It is consistently friendly and happy in our ILE.”

“You get encouraged and inspired a lot.”

“Now I learn from 4 teachers.”

“We get to meet and work with different teachers.”

“It is a really comfortable environment.”

“You have more options. Personally I think I learnt a lot less in a 4 wall classroom.”

“You get to work in different areas and with different teachers.”

“We get to explore different workshops.”

“You can sometimes choose the teacher you work with.”

“We have more choice of activities for our strengths and learning.”

“Our ILE is awesome to work in.”

All children indicated they enjoyed the mixture of working independently, in a small group or with a buddy, e.g.

- A. 30% independent
50% group
20% buddy

- B. 10% independent
50% group
40% buddy

100% enjoyed working on their own for parts of the time, but valued the opportunity for flexibility in this. They liked working with others as they “got support from them”, “got others’ ideas and help”.

“I prefer working with buddies because we get to connect with others and hear their opinions. It helps me add things to my opinions.”

90% of the children felt they learnt a lot better in an ILE (Question 7).

They were all able to identify what sort of learner they were and why. (E.g. (a) Self-directed – “because I show confidence in myself and I can transform my learning into great things.” (b) Guided “I can talk a lot so I think guided best describes me.”)

“I found working with others easy because I honestly work better in a group – we share ideas. I struggle sometimes on my own.”

“I prefer working in a group because I get different ideas about the work.”

End of year data for this survey group of 20 Māori/Pasifika pupils

	Below	At	Above
Reading	3	7	10
Writing	4	10	6
Maths	3	10	7

The biggest overall characteristic is that all of these pupils loved being in the ILE (115 Year 5/6 pupils). They love coming to school. They show real energy and love of learning and enjoy learning with and around each other.

Dr Chris Sarra:

One of the keynote speakers at the Trans-Tasman New Zealand Principals' Conference held in Auckland in 2016 was Dr Chris Sarra from Australia. His messages resonated so much with us. He spoke of his personal journey as a part Aboriginal Australian through the education system. We have included several quotes from his autobiography which provide several key messages about indigenous students and learning for any teacher.

His autobiography is entitled, "Good Morning, Mr Sarra" - My life working for a stronger, smarter future for your children – Published 2012, University of Queensland Press. It is an excellent read.

The importance of relationships

"We promoted high expectations, and I always explained the need to understand that the most important place in the entire education system was the space where a teacher stared the child in the face. This made the classrooms sacred places. Our belief is that everything that goes on in an entire education department had to be designed to enhance that most profound relationship." Page 286

"She understood the importance of relationships being the most fundamental aspect. She was not content to just 'teach to the middle'. She wanted all of the children in her classroom to be successful and she would venture way beyond the bounds of the classroom walls to make sure of it." Page 109

"The mistake many leaders sent to Aboriginal communities make is to think that engaging Aboriginal leadership means bringing Aboriginal people to the table so that they can explain what great plans they have, and what they are going to do to them and their community. True engagement to me has always been about bringing people to the table so we can have an authentic conversation about what our respective priorities are, what our common ground is, what we think the problems are, and what we can achieve together and how." Page 160

"From Bill I learned that great teachers love kids, and they love what they do."

"I was pretty firm with discipline, and in part I wonder if this was because if my kids played up I construed this as wasting 'my' time in 'my' classroom. The reality, now expressed by wisdom, is it was 'our' classroom, and 'our' time." Page 77

"You make a deposit every time you have a positive exchange with a child, and an emotional debit when the exchange is negative. The trick is to have as much or more emotional credit, or positive interactions, with each child so that when you have to discipline them you don't end up on the red side of the ledger.

There are so many ways a teacher can have a positive exchange with a child. It can be as simple as saying, 'Great to see you here today,' or, 'This might be hard but I reckon you can do this,' or even, as Mr Baulch did, helping out when they are hurting. This is part of the magic and power of teaching that I think we can sometimes underestimate." Page 76

Proud to be Indigenous

“School is not just about learning to read and write. It is the place where we bring out our power. This is not the kind of power that white people “give” us. It comes from inside us. From our hearts! From our spirit! From our land! This is our power! Nobody gives it to us and nobody can take it away from us! Not unless we let them. So don’t let anyone take it away from you!’

It was so exciting to be able to speak to them in this way, energised by their silence and the steely look in their eyes as they locked on to mine. On some days I would say, ‘Hands up if you’re Aborigines!’ Their hands would shoot up immediately.

‘Keep your hands up if you think that’s great. Keep it up if you are really proud to be Aboriginal!’ Some would try to push their hands in the air even more.

I would stare back at them, with my hand held high also, and simply say, ‘You better be proud to be Aboriginal!’” Page 212

Danger of lower expectations for indigenous learners

“Senior teachers were now trying to explain to me that it was necessary for us to adjust our expectations. When the District Office sent out a skills checklist for students in the region I was keen to see this executed across the whole school. I sent the checklist to a few teams I had established, only to have it sent back with a note attached saying, ‘We think this is too advanced for our children and so we are working on another checklist that is more suitable.’ It was so frustrating to see such toxic trash coming from those who were supposed to be the experienced leaders in the school.” Page 217

“I had been sold short by people with low expectations, I had sold myself short with limited expectations of who I was and what I could achieve, and I didn’t know I’d done this.

I recalled the principal coming into the room when I was in the last year of primary school. He had a look of surprise, which played out in his voice when he announced, ‘Chris Sarra got the highest score in the TOLA tests!’ Looking back through the lens offered by Gary I could see that he was saying, ‘I didn’t expect that from you!’”

“I didn’t really expect you to get seventy-five percent!’ At the same time, I was receiving a negative message about myself that I didn’t even know I was taking in.” Page 57

Finally –

On Page X in the introduction he writes, “Rather than hope for a brighter future for Indigenous students we now expect it”, and on Page 217, we love the way he talks about “sniffing the breeze” – You might need to read his book to find out what he is talking about here.

School District – Vancouver:

“Go and feed the Squirrels”

A conversation with Philippe

Philippe is a District Principal at a school board in Vancouver. He told us about part of his life when he lived with the indigenous people, (as a school district Superintendent), in a remote part of Northern British Columbia, as well as his recent work in his current school district.

Philippe is an inspiring administrator who has an obvious passion for not only the 1400 indigenous children in the school district, but all of the children. He constantly talked about whatever we do, or is done, is *for the children*.

Greenhouses: A practical way of helping to *turn around the lives of these children*

He, in the short time he has held this position at the School District, has developed some tangible ways that a difference can be made. He is presently getting greenhouses and gardens built so that First Nation children can learn some practical skills and can gain employment in the agriculture-rich province. Through this they can develop self-esteem and a pride in themselves. This also helps to break the generational cycle of many of these children – abuse, poverty and unemployment.

He sees these projects as something concrete for the children and following a Therapeutic approach.

He wants Principals and teachers to drive their schools with compassion – every child needs to feel they are worthy of something and feel loved.

Philippe told us about the child who arrived in his office, who had attended many schools and was behaviourally challenging. Several adults arrived with the child (a little like a Strengthening Families group). Philippe took the child aside and asked him to help him feed the squirrels outside. In doing so, he got alongside the child, developed an important bond and started to create his self-worth.

Philippe stressed over and over again that we can do miracles. We can make a difference for these children by “rebuilding the human being.”

He knows this can happen through “compassion in action”.

We are responsible for all the children. We are not just babysitting them. He wants staff to “believe in the impossible”, and not to waste positive energy.

“Some teachers are angels on two legs.”

Conclusions:

The scale of change in our world over the last few years has required a rethinking of how we teach and what we teach.

Schools around the world have had to reconsider their design and approach to learning. How the brain works and the science of learning has become more important.

The Nature of Learning (2010) sets out seven key principals to guide the setting up and designing of learning environments

These are:

- Learners at the centre
- The social nature of learning
- Emotions as integral to learning
- Recognising individual differences
- Stretching all learners
- Assessment for learning
- Building horizontal connectedness
- It goes on to say..."all the principals should be present in a learning environment for it to be judged truly effective."

So, how do we within these principles ensure that our Maori students achieve successfully and feel that these learning environments meet their needs?

' rethinking what is taught, how it is taught and how learning is assessed has become so much more important" (the Nature of Learning)

Conclusions:

Simply, it is relationships , relationships, relationships.

References:

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- Modern Learning Environments Osborne (2013) Core Education

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Thank you to all of the teachers and principals, especially in the Tauranga and Manawatu areas, who gave of their time so readily to talk with us. Having the opportunity to have time for open and intensive dialogue is very important. We acknowledge that sabbaticals provide people with the time to do this.

A special thank you to our Senior Leadership teams who so readily led our schools during our time away. They are superb leaders and we are so lucky to work beside them.

In the 'Whitireia Way' publication (2012) the research identified five enablers which were identified as important in successfully teaching Maori and Pacifica students. Although this study focussed on older students the five points certainly relate strongly to primary schools.

These were:

- Strong relationships within the learning space, both between teacher and student and student and student
- Belief by the teacher that all students have the ability to achieve
- Mindful that every student is different
- The need for the tutor/ teacher to be reflective in their practice
- The use of good teaching principles

Culturally Responsive:

What next?

Both of our schools are involved in TLIF projects looking a iwi engagement and partnership.

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