

Kahui Ako | Communities of Learning and Secondary-Tertiary Partnerships: what's working, what isn't, where to from here

2018 Principal's Sabbatical (TeachNZ) REPORT
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Executive summary

- I visited 12 institutions covering 7 Kahui Ako | Communities of Learning (CoL | KA), chosen mainly for semi-rural geography
- I aimed to learn what was working best to get benefits of collaboration to the students themselves
- I found lots of good practice and commitment, along with innovative approaches to getting around limitations with the CoL | KA and broader education system
- Secondary-Tertiary Partnerships (STP) were seen positively and have direct benefits to students
- This led me to conclude that the CoL | KA system needs to be urgently reviewed as part of the bigger debate about our education system which is starting to happen
- This report is made to be read quickly and on-screen: the findings are condensed into a one-pager and it has hyperlinks in place of references.

One-pager

Everyone I've met is pretty happy with Secondary-Tertiary Partnerships (STP), especially Trades Academies (TA), for the engagement and achievement of students previously not well engaged by schools. More TA places are wanted. Many secondary schools still struggle with timetabling to facilitate coherent STP learning, and support from Ministry of Education (MoE) in this would be useful. Inter-school collaboration could be improved (eg pooling Gateway funding to streamline approaches to employers) but the individualised nature of the current education system doesn't support this and presents a barrier to employer engagement; lack of time in the school sector also limits effective collaboration between secondary and tertiary staff and industry - unlikely to change unless teachers' collective agreements change to enable this; school sector review needs to be well aligned with tertiary sector review. Good examples of links with industry exist but are not systemic - this is an area to improve and the [Fusion Intern Pathway](#) offers a great insight to how.

No-one I've met thinks the Communities of Learning | Kahui Ako (CoL | KA) *model* is right yet, although all support the basic concept of collaborative approaches between schools and beyond, including iwi and industry:

1. The aims of CoL | KA are not always strongly focussed or apparent, or well shared with communities, and there is frustration with MoE about having to jump through hoops;
2. Time allocations for Leads and Across School Teachers (AST) do cause problems (for host school but also other schools *not* having time to meet). Time to collaborate is really important and needs to be more equitable with consideration given to the impact on students of disrupting continuity with their teachers;
3. Pay issues put pressure on other parts of school management structures;
4. No CoL | KA Leads I met would do the job again and all question why the role requires a current principal (would be better to be shared, preferably primary and secondary, or independent, with local input to selection)
5. CoL | KA like Māwhera, with high numbers of small schools, are further disadvantaged by the current resourcing model compared to CoL | KA with low numbers of bigger schools, in that the lead roles have to work with 13+ schools which takes much more time than working with 4-5. Assuming the basic CoL | KA model continues, the resourcing formula should be adjusted to recognise this;
6. The biggest obstacles faced are relational, between principals, with leadership capacity, commitment to CoL | KA kaupapa and the 'schools as islands' effect of Tomorrow's Schools notable;
7. With no reference to the CoL | KA I visited, gaps in leadership capacity in the sector is an aspect which inter-school collaboration could improve if the sector system allowed this;
8. CoL | KA are all making positive differences despite these issues but all consider this could have happened with less formal collaborations (eg Learning Change Networks);
9. All principals saw benefit in a pragmatic approach to collaborating, eg sharing of resources, collective approach to industry and social/economic agencies;
10. CoL | KA change targets are more likely to be achieved over longer timeframes (5 years +) than current CoL | KA arrangements - change management considerations should be built into the system;
11. Some CoL | KA are currently being offered control of aspects such as Learning Support but don't yet have authority to see through what they wish to do (eg restructure RTLB);
12. Some schools within CoL | KA would like to choose to work with other high-performing schools - my concern is that this could undermine the principle of improving equity which the CoL | KA model can promote;
13. Many necessary and useful collaborations don't fit the "pipeline" model of CoL | KA concept (eg Grow Waitaha in Canterbury) and principals report that the time invested in CoL | KA reduces their ability to effectively collaborate in other ways.

This leaves CoL | KA in "no-man's land" where they are formal and have potential for localised decision-making but are limited by having no statutory authority or entity. Leaders spend energy innovating to find ways around the limitations of the system. Manaiaakalani, including the Outreach Programmes, take a collective approach, distinct from the CoL | KA collaborative approach by creating an entity (Trust) and having clearly stated rules of engagement based on a distinct philosophy, with notably positive results including connection to industry.

Nationally, we need to decide on the level of granularity (school/geographic region) we want for our education system, and how much freedom or direction we want, to retain innovation and culture while improving equity and excellence. The CoL | KA model needs urgent review and this needs to be part of the bigger debate on Tomorrow's Schools which is currently underway.

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Background

I became interested in this topic as I have been a strong advocate for collaboration in education. In the Grey District, where I taught for 12 years before becoming a principal, we worked on transition from Year 8 to Year 9 for several years; later as a Learning Change Network. Driven to improve equitable access to ICT, we investigated collaborative options and came across [Manaiakalani Outreach](#) which we joined in the first wave as [Toki Pounamu](#). Communities of Schools came shortly after and we saw a way to add resourcing to our existing collaboration (Toki Pounamu) so we successfully applied to be a CoL|KA ([Māwhera CoL](#)). Greymouth High School has led the West Coast Trades Academy since it started and has seen significant growth in student achievement through this, with ongoing collaborative work between secondary and tertiary providers. With isolation from urban centres and every West Coast secondary/area school being too small to offer a comprehensive senior secondary curriculum, there is also a strong need to collaborate meaningfully. Finally, the [West Coast Regional Growth Study](#) report's only reference to secondary education was as an obstacle to the recruitment of professionals to the region which, given Grey High's vision linked to social and economic development for our district, contributed to my desire to see what other regions like ours have done.

Of these forms of collaboration or collectivisation, Communities of Learning|Kahui Ako stood out to me as having a high ratio of input to output. I wanted to find what other places were doing that made a difference for students.

Methodology

1. Formulated a hunch and read around this (ERO, MoE, Michael Fullan)
2. Contacted MoE staff to discuss the nature of collaborations around the country, to shape up an itinerary
3. Phoned CoL/KA and Trades leads, discussing my hunch and arranging times to meet
4. Drafted guiding questions (see Appendix 1)
5. Met with people and discussed their thoughts. This was more two-way as the tour progressed and I was able to share my observations to that point
6. Recorded my summaries in the question guide records, along with ongoing notes as ideas developed
7. Printed records and viewed together, noting patterns
8. Compared observed patterns to my own experience and reading

Evaluation and further research

- There are CoL | KA and trades academies throughout the country, and many other collaborations between schools, but I was only able to see a sample
- There appears to be a difference between the collective approach of Manaiakalani and the collaborative approach of CoL | KA: I've made suggestions about how this affects performance but this deserves further research
- I mainly met with principals, when I had intended to gather community (student, teacher, parent, board, employer) voice
- Despite this, strong themes emerged which met my "common sense" test and were well discussed with other close observers of education, so I believe my observations and conclusions are reasonably sound
- I returned with a list of action points for Māwhera CoL | KA, GHS and me personally/professionally
- I was unable to make strong recommendations for system change as it's clear to me that this needs to be part of a bigger process
- That bigger process is underway currently (education sector review).

The continued involvement of NZ with international education researchers and innovators such as Michael Fullan is critically important, as is regional and national debate about the nature of the education system we want and need.

The obvious gap in my research, namely community voice, is worth following up.

References / sources of further information

Most of the reading for this has been online and can be accessed through the hyperlinks above.

[ERO](#) and [MoE](#) have good publications about CoL|KA and STP collaborations

[NZCER](#) ongoing research, reports and publications

[Education Counts](#) has emerging details about CoL|KA

[Inside-out and downside-up; how leading from the middle has the power to transform education systems](#), a think/action piece by Steve Munby & Michael Fullan (Jan 2016), is very useful as is Michael Fullan's [blog](#)