



2019 Sabbatical Report - Kim Nikora, Thames South School

*Identifying driving forces and ways of overcoming restraining forces
when collaborating to make a difference as a Community of Learning.*

*Ko Maniapoto te iwi
Ko Motakiora te maunga
Ko Ngati Rora te hapu
Ko Mangaokewa te awa
Ko Te Tokonganui a noho te marae
Ko Kim Nikora taku ingoa*

Acknowledgements

He waka eke noa - we rise together, fall together, work together, keep going together.

It was both satisfying and exhausting, taking on the foundation leadership role for our Community of Learning. It is an experience I recommend to others. As a huge part of my educational leadership journey from 2015, it was a natural progression to make this the focus of my principal sabbatical. As the whakatauki above acknowledges, it was a collective mission. I acknowledge the local colleagues who also chose to charge into the unknown and go for it. The principals, CoL teams, school communities, the wider community of the Thames - Kauaeranga Community of Learning and more recently, early childhood centres. Thank you all for your

willingness to enrol, share your perspectives and stories, in order to make the most of this way of working together.

I thank my Board of Trustees who fully supported our engagement as a school and this sabbatical opportunity. I especially share my gratitude and thanks with the teachers and support staff of Thames South School, who committed to working with the broader school community, chasing greater success for every student and their learning pathway. Finally and most importantly, I acknowledge the willingness of my senior leadership teams to step up and into leadership roles, more especially the dynamic duo of Jeannie and Cheryl, who did a fantastic job in my absence.

Executive Summary

The Education Review Office (2016) confirmed the number one challenge facing the New Zealand education system continued to be ensuring equity and excellence for every student. The Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako initiative (previously the National government's IES strategy) created an important opportunity for interested principals to come together and design a collaborative approach that would use this whole system reform model to identify and action appropriate levers for change and innovation.

Our establishing group of eight Thames principals, visualised increased collaboration for a common purpose, whilst still maintaining the unique flavour and identity of each school context. Once accepting the challenges to build professional practice within and across schools, make enduring shifts in the educational landscape for Māori and grow a broader community that connected every learner journey across sectors and through transition points, we were off.

Unlike previous Ministry of Education PLD initiatives, the Communities of Learning model was systemic reform that required a “building the plane as we were flying” approach. Frameworks, guides and tools were only just emerging, leaders were working in an adaptive space, learning on the job. The successful interaction between multiple aspects or parts became paramount. Finding ways to align school and community contexts and prioritising focal points could be achieved by running with the driving forces at play.

Rationale

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

As the establishment Lead Principal of Thames - Kauaeranga Kāhui Ako for the past two and a half years, gauging progress in relation to implementation, sustainability and success, gives me an opportunity to reflect on leadership practice, systemic change to make a greater difference in learner outcomes and induction processes with our new Dual Leadership approach taking our Community of Learning forward.

By connecting research, models and stakeholder voice, my aim was to retrospectively unpack the practices of the collaboration team in order to expose successful levers that drove us forward as a community learning. What worked, what didn't and how have we contributed to increasing the success of our Māori learners to date.

The leadership group initially resisted top down criteria that narrowed the change initiative down to achievement challenges, but eventually gave in to directives, in order to get the High Level Plan across the line and associated funding released. Foundation thinking sat with above whakatauki - It is the people who are most important. Building a *poutama tau* from this perspective clearly sets directions for moving forward.

Methodology

My approach to this sabbatical project is a balance between theory and practice. Reviewing documentation, artefacts and voice gathered over time and more recently. Attending two professional learning conferences that support and challenge the content created and ultimately make connections to relevant models that help to compare and contrast thinking. The final report will represent the alignment of thought and reflection and ultimately synthesise my thinking towards a succinct and thought provoking executive summary.

Process Models

The development maps support Communities of Learning to chart their development across 6 foundational domains: teaching, leading, evidence, pathways, partnering and building. Applying these progression tools that sit within our strategic directions as a CoL, focused my methodology. I also applied various change management frameworks or tools to synthesis the stories shared. I used these models and tools to make comparisons, gather reflections and connect threads gathered.

Gathering Voice

Stories possess common threads as well as unique perspectives. Talking with school and community stakeholders gathered perspectives and brought to light common expectations, understandings and clarity of purpose. Synthesis was framed by the six domains and focused on identifying driving forces that were perceived as helping to gain and maintain momentum.

Early theorising on my part listened for connections to the following threads;

- influence of school level leadership on innovations aligned to CoL engagement
- value of and shifts with professional inquiry within and across schools
- knowledge of the learner, curriculum and pedagogy prioritised as tools for culturally responsive practice
- ways in which Treaty of Waitangi obligations and partnerships with whanau, hapu and iwi have been strengthened
- Learner aspirations, strengthened transition points and learner pathways

Artefacts & evidence

From the moment we began to implement our High Level Plan, artefacts, minutes, feedback and reflection were integral to our way of working. A shared google drive held action plans, data tables, a Memorandum of Agreement, Professional Learning opportunities and resource banks organised to connect with workstreams. Records of engagement were recorded by the Across CoL team, regular bulletins and updates were sent out to leaders and schools. These documents along with various surveys, conversations and recorded minutes were mined to find the nuggets that gave momentum to our work. Reflection in action and on action, pick up of key tools and resources and aiming for “enrolment” as opposed “to buy” activity.

Professional learning opportunities

During my sabbatical time out, I attended both the Māori principals Akatea national conference in Palmerston North and the MAC - Māori Achievement Collaborative national conference in Taranaki. Both opportunities help to affirm current responsive practices and push forward on new and exciting ways to advocate for change.

Key themes embraced affirm the directions taken by our Community of Learning; we must teach the history of our country, local curriculum that embraces Mātauranga Māori and social justice pedagogies will make a difference; Mana tamariki empowers the learner by acknowledging the potential within all tamariki Māori passed down to them through their whakapapa. Finally and most relevant to this piece of work is the difference that leaders can make by their action or inaction.

The relevant thread of our work as a CoL began with exploring the place of The Treaty of Waitangi in education, using Ministry tools such as Tātaiako, Measurable Gains Framework and Hautu for self review and strategic planning and finally this year engaging with Anne Milne to explore ways to go beyond culturally responsive pedagogy towards a more critical, culturally sustaining way of working.

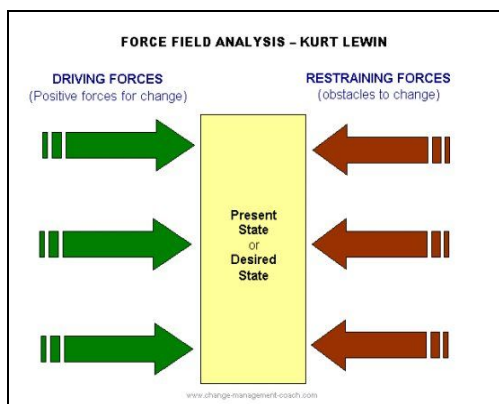
Synthesis of Research

Much of my personal understandings, worldview, positioning and knowledge comes from my journey as a female Māori learner and leader within the existing English Medium (Mainstream) school provisions. It is enhanced by 30+ years as a practitioner, 22 of them as a principal. Recent post grad study in Educational Leadership has expanded my engagement with material & research from both our unique context in Aotearoa, New Zealand and that of diversity scholars internationally. This project foundations come from my decision to interconnect and synthesise specific research threads;

- Change theory & frameworks to support CoL innovation
- Acknowledging multiple worldviews/culturally diversity to move beyond current paradigms
- Coaching, professional Inquiry and reflective practice as a catalyst for change

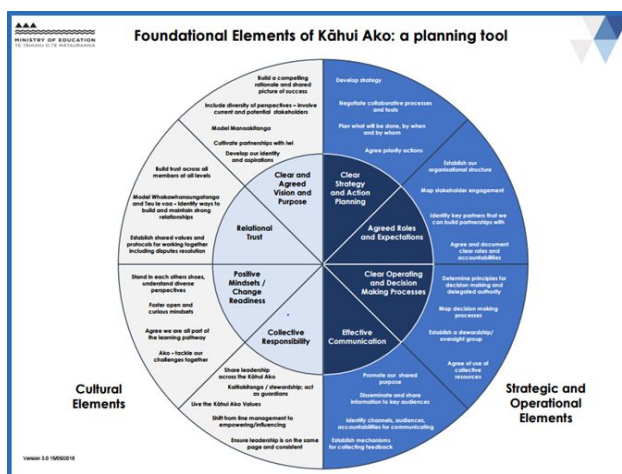
My approach to the change and implementation process therefore sat within my beliefs and values;

- Inherent capability is present in all Māori - liberation through self-determination has always been possible.
- Professional inquiry is a tool for improving teacher effectiveness.
- By focusing on knowing the learner better, increasing content knowledge and extending pedagogical practice to be more responsive to diversity, the mindsets of teachers and leaders can be open to finding ways to break open personal, instructional and institutional dimensions.
- Power relationships are at the crux of true shifts in success for Māori
- As practitioners, we must know our nation's history in order to shift away from the "Standard Story" that holds us all back from becoming a truly bi-cultural nation.
- You can only change what you do in order to influence a shift for others, everyone on their own pathway of knowing and understanding.
- Take the path of least resistance and be open to new and uncharted pathways. Find the early adopters and run with it, the wave will be close behind.



Force field analysis, Lewin (1951) was a key decision making tool. Various guides and templates were accessed when we identified desired change. As the practice of identifying driving and restraining forces increased, clarity of purpose, action and reflection were strengthened.

As we moved forward on the cultural elements unpacked within the foundation elements planning tool, MoE version 2.0, strategic and operational elements became more apparent.



This framework both affirmed driving forces and explored the desired states to be achieved.

Findings

“Māku e whatu, mā koutou e tāniko”

Innovative and visionary leadership to equip learners as citizens of the world

As it has been said many times, nothing worth doing is achieved easily. Educational leaders everywhere begin by working with what they have, within the systems, structures and contexts that hold or bind them. They bring their journey as a social being along with a kete of personal and professional resources. Challenges or obstacles and the strategies engaged to overcome them will therefore differ from leader to leader.

A myriad of factors impacted on CoL and School level leadership practice. As foundation elements were established and work streams engaged, the following restraining forces were identified as having a negative impact on implementation and long term success;

- Union reluctance to accept the staffing and funding model.
- Stakeholder reluctance to work in an adaptive space, that could evolve to be something other than what was signed up for.
- Early enrolment by the COL before sustainability factors are in place by MoE can impact negatively on the flow of workstreams.
- Existing culture of competition between schools undermining deeper collaboration, including individual schools and personnel enrolling for school based benefit only.
- Teacher autonomy low, with performativity strongly espoused within political rhetoric.
- Perception that this would be a top-down, expert model, professional delivery approach.
- Whanau, hapu and iwi reluctant and/or cynical with yet another “fix them” model
- Systemic cultural bias and deficit theorising paying lip service to the goal of Success for Māori as Māori.
- Time pressures for schools and individuals, perception that CoL work is “an add on” requiring further time and energy
- Concern over the sustainability of the model, particularly with regards to funding and resourcing, changes in leadership and the impact of a change in political party.

- Some teachers' immovable negativity towards the CoL Model due to it being a National Govt initiative - perceived as being 'waste of money' that could be spent better elsewhere, National Standards motivated, more accountability / less trust etc
- Inability to see CoL Achievement Challenges, Teacher Inquiry, Acceleration as interrelated/mutually supportive not isolated aspects
- Some Principals lack of follow through/commitment - dipping in and out, or verbally agreeing but not 'doing'
- Limited take up by teachers for CoL PLD Sundowners, a small committed group of approx 25 regular attendees. Mostly from schools with higher engagement rates.
- Education Review Office evaluations of CoL schools shifting their focus away from CoL to ticking boxes etc
- ongoing challenge of negative mindset/deficit attitude to learning behaviour ? this aligns with that enabler around exploring resistance in respectful ways - while still increasing the challenges - e.g. the progression from Jay Ruka to Anne Milne.

Moving beyond restraining forces to successfully implement innovation and change was again a personalised and context- based experience, and could not always be seen purely as a result of “CoL” work. However, it has been possible to draw together threads that successfully challenged the status quo and push against the resistance to change.

The following driving forces were identified as contributing to momentum and innovative change;

- Existing professional relationships and success with previous collaboration projects provided a foundation for moving forward.
- Collective agreement that something different needed to happen, specifically improving the success pathways for Māori Learners.
- Differentiating aspects of each school was a strength for CoL, supporting a “strengths within” approach to overlapping themes for collective engagement and response.
- A strength-based theory of change that focused on all stakeholders as learners and teachers
- Partnering with Iwi at the conceptual development phase of work.

- Discerning selection of tools, frameworks and working groups that aligned with the High Level Plan within the implementation phase of this system change.
- Lead principal's strength in educational leadership, culturally responsive curriculum and facilitation of professional inquiry, self review and adult education.

Overcoming restraining forces and increasing the trajectory of success was attributed to the following;

- Motivation and commitment from the establishment leadership and governance teams was very high. Continuing to do what we had always done was not working.
- Securing high calibre Across and In-School personnel aligned to initial Professional Learning Programmes.
- Regaining practitioner autonomy by growing a high trust, reciprocal model of adult learning.
- Collective enrolment in acceleration theory through ALLs and ALiM PLD, ultimately creating a curriculum and achievement plan that differentiated learner access to literacy and numeracy
- Accessing MoE led initiatives around Iwi partnering, school information sharing and curriculum tools.
- Alignment of school and CoL directions, focusing on overlapping intersecting actions.
- Exploring resistance through professional learning catalysts, coaching, mentoring, objectivity whilst committing to up-holding the mana of all stakeholders, their lived experiences and diverse perspectives.
- Strong and consistent transition planning and induction for new principals and CoL personnel.
- Early adopters / influencers / role models within schools showed a positive toward CoL goals at the early stages. Feedback from the first symposium affirmed this thinking.
- CoL teachers, who attended Sundowners, expressed a willingness and or enjoyment in sharing honestly and openly with colleagues from other schools.
- The presence of motivation, goodwill and willingness of more than a quarter of CoL teachers to share practice with the aim of professional learning and growth for the collective group, even though current workload was high.

Implications

***Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa**
The child is the heart of the matter*

Time will tell whether there will be lasting and sustainable change as a result of this initiative. All conversations alluded to the belief that in its current form, the model is not sustainable for the lead principal, the across CoL team and individual schools because of funding and resourcing constraints. The current hold on creating new CoLs sends mixed messages, when new Learning Support resources are rolled out using existing community of learning networks.

Research affirms that there is a direct link between effective leadership practice, teacher practice and student success. This includes cultural competency, strong relationships and pedagogical knowledge. Without a bigger commitment to decolonise current systems and structures, to embrace our history as a country and to accelerate efforts to ensure Te Reo Māori flourishes, enduring shifts for Māori will not be achievable.

The journey to date has primarily placed a spotlight on the adults within our change innovation, how their actions impact on student success. Shifting focus to radiate out from the learner, as trialled with the Te Ara Whakamana - Mana enhancement framework, gives credence to the idea that the system will evolve to fit the learner and not the other way around.

Benefits for my leadership journey

Stepping out on sabbatical gives you time to consider your leadership journey and your future in education. Taking this time to reflect on my growth over the last 2 years, taking a break and spending time with whanau, has given me an opportunity to destress and gain back a work-life balance. This work has given me a sense of satisfaction, in that my role as the lead principal and facilitator of system wide change has ultimately had positive impacts for all stakeholders.

I am hopeful that the time I have taken to synthesise my thinking may help others consider continued endorsement of communities of learning. I have clarity on the impact our work has had for Thames South School teachers and learners and I am confident that the foundations in

place today have us well set to move forward as a Community of Learning with our new dual leadership model.

Conclusion

Although there is still much to do to achieve the level of success Māori Learners should be afforded under the Treaty of Waitangi, our Community of Learning/Kāhui Ako has begun the journey towards improving the learning pathways for our Maori learners.

As a tool for change, Lewin's Force Field analysis of *driving and restraining forces* model could theoretically influence modifications or adaptations to the existing structures of our schools and our CoL if the time is taken to investigate the balance of power in every issue and push hard to ensure the driving forces outway the restraining ones. This will only be successful if key stakeholders are included, opponents and allies are found and concepts of self interest, communication and purpose are enacted.

This report sits as a possible induction tool, as evidence of progress and as a summary of the body of leadership work enacted in the last two and a half years. I hope that it can also go some way towards helping other CoLs embarking on this journey.

"Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education **sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be **damaged and erased through schooling.**"**

Paris & Alim 2017

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