



Sabbatical Report

Steve Lindsey,
Principal Papamoa College
Term 2 2016

This sabbatical report presents thoughts, reflections, and comments as they relate to *next generation* student learning primarily in the context of Papamoa College, but also in relation to the wider New Zealand education sector. *Next generation learners* are our current students, who aspire (and are beginning) to learn in more flexible, interactive and engaging ways. Their learning journey is personalised and organised in collaboration with teachers, peers and parents. Learning is always meaningful and relevant to life.

This report is not intended to be a formal investigation or academic research, but rather an inquiry into what schools need to focus attention on, to better serve *next generation learners*.

I very much appreciated the time and space to be able to reflect, think deeply, and experience new countries and cultures. I had the privilege of meeting different and interesting people, listening to their views on student learning, and the time to consider what might be necessary as a school leader, to develop current learning and teaching practices.

I am thankful to have received this principal sabbatical awarded by the Ministry of Education as part of the Teacher Study Award scheme.

I wish to also acknowledge and thank the Papamoa College Board of Trustees for supporting this principal sabbatical.

Context for Sabbatical

The previous 6 years had been spent establishing and growing Papamoa College, a new secondary school that was founded on maximising the benefits of learning communities, learning in community, introducing a school curriculum that integrates the New Zealand Curriculum learning areas, and developing active learners who experience learning within authentic contexts.

Having navigated the establishment stage of the organisation, the challenge for Papamoa College is to remain a growing and innovative organisation. It is important for the school, staff and leaders to continue to be current in their thinking, be challenged by new ideas and always learning.

Papamoa College hosts many visiting school leaders, teachers and board of trustee members, and is often used as an example of a school environment that promotes modern learning practices. It seems apparent that a large number of school communities are wrestling (independently) with defining what modern learning practices are and what the implications will be for their school and community. Given this duplication across schools I was interested to also explore the question: What might be needed across the New Zealand compulsory educational sector, to better cater for *next generation learners*.

Learning Experience

I had the opportunity to attend two educational conferences, with associated travel to diverse and interesting places.

The Future of Education Conference

Pixel International Conferences, June 2016, Florence, Italy

Promoting transnational cooperation and sharing good practice in the field of innovation for education. The conference brought together teachers, researchers, practitioners and project managers from all over the world to share findings, expertise and experience about innovative teaching and learning methodologies.

This conference involved education researchers from across the world presenting current and future focused research papers on contemporary education topics.

Interesting topics and presentations included:

- *A biological perspective on educational transition: experiences of children parents and teachers*
- *It's a cultural thing helping college students successfully navigate the higher education landscape*
- *Personalising American Secondary Education: Findings from a small, urban secondary school*
- *Students in Action Media popular culture and pedagogy as social intervention*
- *The preparation of inclusive social justice education leaders: an international call*
- *Teaching online undergraduate business students: reflections on communication and connection*
- *Student utilisations of flexibility of time and place in a fully online academic course*
- *Using personalised technology to increase student success*
- *Successful implementation of 21st century learning: an exploration of mobile and blended learning*
- *ICT in education sustainability contributions and challenges*
- *Efficiency and effectiveness in teaching and learning: Need for new paradigms*
- *Curriculum design in Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences*

Strong and recurring themes that underpinned a significant proportion of the research presented included:

- The call for increasing student involvement and control in their learning
- Learning takes place and is influenced by the social and cultural context of individual learners
- Learners need to be able to develop as global citizens with an international perspective.
- Communication and connections are critical for effective learning
- There is a move away from designed curricular to fluid and negotiated learning

Spending a period of time in Singapore, provided me with the opportunity to experience and explore a society that presents solutions to social, cultural and economic challenges that are in stark contrast to New Zealand. The nation's objective to be economically relevant and be positioned on the global stage, directly informs planning, growth and social structures. Technology, innovation and progressive thinking are visible hallmarks throughout Singapore.

When travelling through Europe (especially Italy) you experience a very different sense of what is important. Steeped in a long history and a rich cultural identity, Europeans value where they have come from and recognise the events and influences that have shaped them into who they are today.

Travelling, observing and experiencing different cultures and peoples, exposes you to alternate thinking and ways of life. It is an obvious fact due to the close proximity and adjoining borders that countries in Asia and the European Union share, there is a greater degree of connectedness and opportunities to relate to each other.

The view to develop New Zealand students to become global citizens is not new, the New Zealand Curriculum states exactly this, but it could receive a more prominent place in our schools. Students must be prepared in very tangible ways to understand, communicate and connect to their global environment.

BLC Building Learning Communities Conference

November Learning: Alan November July 2016 Boston, USA

Hosted by Alan November this conference, explored the concept of students being active in their learning and the promotion of modern learning practices. This conference was largely attended by educationalists from across North America, who are committed to and very enthusiastic about authentic student learning.

Keynote themes and thought provoking presentations included:

- Most Likely to Succeed: A movie about re-imagining what students and teachers are capable of doing. Included a presentation from the Producer Ted Dintersmith.
- Creating the ultimate flipped classroom (and never looking back)
- *Remaking spaces for blended learning: the café, the studio and the stage*
- *Five five days of school – What to do in the first five days with students*
- *Learning from a perspective – students learn from their own perspective*
- *Global Education – a programme to develop global awareness and understanding*
- *Leadership – Managing the change*
- *Empower teachers . . . Leading change*

This conference endorsed and promoted the view that effective learning puts the student as the initiator and navigator in their learning journey. Authentic learning results from the student experiencing relevant and real life contexts. When students have more control of their learning, more will be achieved and at higher attainment levels.

Summary comments:

Common dilemmas

Educationalist throughout the world are facing similar educational challenges - despite differences in nationalities, cultures and bureaucracy. It is encouraging to learn that although there is still a long way to go in many educational organisations, the solutions involve a shift towards more student control, greater relevance and meaning for learning, and a responsive approach to the needs of the learner.

Balancing the demands from government with an emphasis on performativity and accountability, with developing next generation learners continues to be a tension for schools and leadership.

Learners have to be Global Citizens

Having the opportunity to relate and learn from people who view and experience the world differently, reinforced the belief that the ability to understand, connect and communicate as a global citizen is a priority for our learners.

During my time away I was in Europe when a bomb was detonated at the Istanbul Ataturk Airport killing 41 people, the Brexit referendum vote was held, and travelled in the USA when the Republican National Conference was held. This included the spectacle that surrounded the then aspiring Republican Party presidential candidate, Donald Trump.

Throughout these events I talked and learnt from many people who were affected in some way or at least had a stake in the outcome. Making a connection with these people, for whom, the events were significant and had real consequences for them, no doubt made my learning more authentic. Learning as a global citizen you not only understand better the complexity of the interconnected world but you begin to view the world as a whole.

Personalising Learning

Developing life-long learners is an important tenet of the New Zealand Curriculum. Schools therefore have a responsibility to ensure students become the best learners they can be.

Better courses, programmes, and qualifications, won't necessarily make students better learners. However, developing students who are actively involved in their learning and responding to individual needs of students, will make better learners.

Learning experiences at school need to be personalised to specific students. Students will learn and will achieve better, when their learning is relevant and meaningful to them.

Where to Next?

One of the purposes of this sabbatical was to consider *Where to next for Papamoa College?* My interest also extended to apply this question to the wider New Zealand education sector and how as a sector we can better progress forward. The following comments are from the perspective of a school principal undertaking to develop an effective school that prepares

next generation learners, meeting the needs of a growing community, while operating within the bounds of the New Zealand education sector.

Schools as learning and innovative organisations

Schools need to operate as a learning organisations. Every aspect of a school should be part of a growth and development strategy. This includes the attitude of staff to include how they view their employment and teaching practice. Working with students doesn't necessarily mean that a school will be a learning organisation, but thinking as a learner will.

The challenge for Papamoa College now that it has moved beyond its establishment phase, is to maintain a commitment and forward momentum to continual growth and innovation.

Future student learning needs to be personalised

Students need to be treated as learners who are on a personalised learning journey. If learning is becoming more contextual, flexible and student controlled, then schools need to reduce their reliance on subjects, programmes, timetables, assessment systems etc.

The learning environment should be less about particular learning methodologies and more about assisting students' progress through their learning journey. The role of the teacher is to collaborate and plan with students, guide, lead, teach, correct, evaluate and report on learning. The art of effective teaching practice is to know what to do and when.

Schools need to operate within an education sector learning strategy

There is an absence of any education sector wide *learning strategy* that enables schools to align their own strategic development to. There are national education goals, priority focus areas, student achievement targets, curriculum documents, and a focus on school collaboration etc, but no obvious and cohesive future strategy for learning and pedagogy.

This situation is acutely obvious when new schools are established. The opportunity to establish a new school provides the freedom to explore and implement a wide range of possibilities for what student learning could be. While most professionals would appreciate such autonomy, the resulting and differing philosophies/ethos/practices of individual schools, will to continue to add to the enormous diversity across the sector.

Existing schools undergoing redevelopment projects also contend with defining what the future of student learning should be like and then determining how to move forward. There is significant duplication across the sector in this process.

The underlying premise for self-governing schools to make their own decisions should be protected, but there should be a clear strategic learning message for schools to align to - a compass point in the future to aim for.

Repeated call for effective collaboration and connections between education sector groups

One of the most significant aspects of a school leaders' job is interpreting and synthesising the information, requirements and expectations from the many education sector groups. These include TEC, ERO, EDUCANZ, NZQA, MinEdu and the numerous initiatives . . .

Each of these education groups performs and produces quality work, but it seems mostly independent of each other. This is not a new phenomenon. There is a strong call to better align the objectives and activities of these important education sector groups, so as to not leave the interpretation entirely to individual schools.

The Ministry of Education are in a unique position and have access to a sector wide perspective that could better integrate the objectives and activities of these sector groups.

The Next Steps . . .

This sabbatical has provided a valuable opportunity to be able to reflect, listen, learn and spend some time recharging.

I have been able to return to and spent time re-thinking about the fundamental beliefs I hold as a leader around learning, education and the purpose of schools.

I am firmly positioned to focus on developing personalised learning for student and creating global citizens.

I will continue to influence Papamoa College to be a growing organisation that meets the needs of *next generation* learners, and promote these ideals across the wider New Zealand education sector where possible.