

To Collaborate or Not

Sabbatical Report Term 2 2017

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Focus: Professional Learning Activity

To investigate Collaborative Teaching Practices and Pedagogy and what that might look like in our school.

Background:

In 2013 I was one of 50 Waikato Principals who travelled to Melbourne to look into Modern Learning Environments. Each of the five schools we visited were different, some in the city others more rural, and one with 26 different ethnicities represented in their school. My main focus for this trip was to look at pedagogy changes and new environments and how this was having an impact on student learning.

On my return I presented a proposal to staff that we should begin a discussion around what this might look like in our school. In our senior Y8 class we decided to change how the students learning was organised and planned. After one term of learning in a new way we changed the environment into a MLE. The immediate impact was improved student attendance and greater ownership by the students of their work and learning. Using the lessons learnt from this experience we set up the Y7 classroom as a MLE the following year. Teachers of both classes worked close together in support of each other.

In 2015 the Senior Leadership Team (5 in total) travelled together to Christchurch to visit schools that had recently been built or amalgamated with a focus on the learning outcomes of students in larger groups with more than one teacher.

At the beginning of 2016 the third MLE was set up again using the knowledge we had acquired from the Christchurch visit and from our own experience.

The next stage is to look at how Collaborative Teaching Strategies will further enhance student progress and achievement, hence my reason for applying for a Principal's Sabbatical.

Purpose:

The purpose of my sabbatical is therefore to increase my knowledge and understanding of:

- * Collaborative Teaching Strategies
- * What impact on Student Learning this will have.
- * How would this look in our school?
- * What are the issues to be resolved before this can happen?

My intention is to revisit schools in:

- Melbourne
- Christchurch
- Auckland
- Hamilton

Look more deeply into the research conducted by Neil O'Reilly - Principal Waitakiri School.

Consult with Te Puru School teachers as to their understanding and knowledge of what Collaborative Teaching would look like in our school.

My findings and report will help me lead our school direction into the future, support staff and give advise to the Board of Trustees and our school community.

My focus from beginning to end will be to look for Collaborative Teaching Strategies that will support and enhance learning for all our students.

Methodology:

1. **Visits to other schools.** The following schools were visited not necessarily in the order listed:

Glenview Primary	Deanwell Primary	Baverstock Oaks Primary
Ormiston Primary	Mt. Eden Normal	Epson Normal
South New Brighton	Pebbleton Primary	Marshlands Primary
Broadmeadows Valley	Ladbrookes Primary	Broadfield Primary

2. **Discussion with Principals, Teachers and Students**

Principals conducted a tour of their school, enabling me to talk with teachers and students in collaborative teaching environments. In all cases the teachers responded with enthusiasm and great excitement to be working in a Collaborative way with other teachers. Not one said they would like to revert back to one teacher-one classroom as in the past. I also asked the question about what the issues or stop signs that had to be overcome so the relationship was a positive one for teachers and students. Opportunities to plan together, critical reflect practice discussions, daily PD opportunities - learning from each other and how reporting to parents and care givers is conducted (who is responsible to write reports for each student, etc...)

Where possible take photos of teachers working collaboratively together.

3. **Professional Readings written by Principals, Educational Researchers, etc...** Special mention for Neil O'Reilly for his thesis *The Key Components to Creating Effective Collaborative*

Teaching and Learning Environments also his workshop I attended *Collaborative Teaching and Learning in Flexible Learning Spaces*

The Nature of Learning - Dumont, Istance and Benavides

4. Attendance at Workshops/Conferences, Etc...

- * NZEI Rural Principals Conference in Christchurch
- * Waikato Principals Association Road Trip to Auckland
- * Neil O'Reilly workshop - Auckland Principals Leadership Conference

Findings:

Examples of Collaborative Teaching - Numbers:

1. Teaching in pairs
2. Teaching in threes
3. Teaching in fours

In schools of that have a student roll of 250 or less the most popular structure was having teachers working in pairs. In many cases the Principal and Senior Management Team made the decision who would work together. In some cases there was consultation with staff about who they would like to work with. Principal's reported to me that in the end, it was *what is best for the students and their learning* that made the final decision. Recruitment of teachers who had previous experience working in a collaborative teaching space was also a focus when teachers moved on or retired, creating a vacancy. In many cases the teacher who would be working with the appointee was involved in that process.

Collaborative Teaching Strategies

These have been well documented and trailed over recent years in most new or amalgamated schools in Christchurch, Auckland and most other large centres.

It is not my intention to go into any detail re each strategy, other than to identify and list each one:

1. One Teach, One Observe
2. One Teach, One Assist
3. Targeted Teaching
4. Station Teaching
5. Team Teaching
6. Experimental Teaching

Effective Pedagogy

This is key to an effective change away from the production line type structure of schools and learning last century. Successful Collaborative Teaching in a MLE, FLS or ILS has it's beginnings in looking at:

- * How we teach
- * What we teach
- * How much say the students have in their learning
- * Are we prepared to let go and allow the students to drive their learning?

The students must be at the centre of all decisions about learning - what is best for them, not about what is best for teachers.

The 8 Basics of Motivation (Dumont, Istance and Benavides)

1. The students perceive stable links between actions and achievement
2. The students feel competent to do what is expected of them
3. The students value the subject and have a clear sense of purpose
4. The students perceive the environment as favourable for learning
5. The students experience positive emotions towards learning activities
6. The students direct their attention away from learning when they experience negative emotions
7. The students are more persistent in learning when they can manage their resources and deal with the obstacles efficiently
8. The students free up cognitive resources for learning when they are able to influence the intensity, duration and expression of their emotions.

The 7 Principles of Learning (Dumont, Istance and Benavides)

1. Learners at the Centre
2. The Social Nature of Learning
3. Emotions are Integral to learning
4. Recognising Individual Differences
5. Stretching all Students
6. Assessment for Learning
7. Building Horizontal Connections

Old v New:

Times they are a changing as Bob Dylan wrote and sang about last century. Many schools today were built back in the 1950s when schools resembled a production line. The *Scheme* for each curriculum area was used to identify knowledge and skills each student will know in each class level. All learning was constructed by the teacher who was the fountain of all knowledge. Open Plan schools were introduced as a new way forward that would have larger groups of students working with at least 4 teachers. This system failed due to Education Board appointments and the lack of professional development available for teachers thrown together. Working in a collaborative environment takes planning and time to develop relationships and respect among the teachers, throw 90 odd students into the scenario and hell can break lose.

I have not during the time of my sabbatical come across any evidence that supports single cell teaching as being better and that production line type learning has any significant positive benefits for today's learners.

Through the early part of this century many schools began to look into:

1. Learning to Learn
2. Brain-Based Learning
3. Different Learning Styles
4. Gender Differences in Learning
5. Personalised Learning
6. Student Centred Learning.

Research/Evidence that Collaborative Teaching has positive outcomes for Students:

John Hattie has investigated and researched the benefits of collaborative Teaching and Learning:

** There is great power from teachers learning from each other. When teachers begin to collaborate and develop common understandings, they all begin to move in the right direction.*

** Teachers who work collectively, collaboratively to understand their impact and that is probably the single most important factor in this business.*

Neil O'Reilly writes:

Co-Teaching in a FLS can make a significant positive difference for learners and enhance the quality of teaching, teacher efficacy and well-being. In the New Zealand context Collaborative teaching and learning in FLS provides opportunity to affirm the NZC and concepts important to Maori, further enhancing educational outcomes, well being and self regulation for tangata whenua:

- *Manaakitanga*
- *Whanaungatanga*
- *Rangatiratanga*
- *Aka*
- *Tuakana Teina*

These concepts should be evident in every New Zealand school, evidence suggests that FLS provide additional opportunity for enhancing outcomes for Maori ako.

However, where teachers do not have shared beliefs, where they lack collaborative skills, where they want to control their class and believe in a teacher centric model, Co-Teaching is unlikely to produce positive outcomes.

Teachers working collaboratively in a shared space need to have agreement of:

** Taking collective responsibility for the learning, well being and hauora of all students.*

- * Make key decisions together.
- * Work towards agreed understandings about what quality teaching and learning looks, feels and sounds like.

Research provides evidence, individuals will out perform themselves when working collaboratively - Fullan

Conversely a limiting factor in schooling improvement is the lack of collaboration and teachers unable to learn reciprocally on a continuous basis within their classrooms - Fullan

Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much - Helen Keller

In the long history of mankind (and animal kind too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed - Charles Darwin

I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot, together we can do great things - Mother Teresa

The Benefits of Collaborative Teaching

- * Teachers have the opportunity to share their strengths and passions.
- * Students can be grouped in a variety of ways, depending on their learning needs.
- * Greater opportunity for extension and support for learners.
- * Teachers are more motivated, which results in better outcomes for students.
- * Students get to see teachers working together, modelling problem solving, working things through to a successful conclusion
- * Teachers have daily support and help from each other, critical reflection opportunities to improve teacher practice.
- * Two or more teachers working together offer multiple perspectives.
- * Building better teacher-student relationships.
- * Sharing of reporting to parents/caregivers student progress and achievement.
- * Students have improved attitudes to school.
- * Students have an improved sense of well-being.
- * More able students are challenged and extended.
- * Less able students get more targeted support.
- * Improved sense of self regulation and efficacy.

Concerns/Issues of Collaborative Teaching

- * Students will struggle if teachers want to maintain the control of every aspect of learning and the environment.
- * Teacher expectations are inconsistent.
- * Noise levels are high.

* Teachers do not know how to use the space effectively.

Successful Collaborative Teaching doesn't happen over night, getting the right people together, changing the pedagogy, critical reflective practice and continual support is an important and crucial role of the Principal and Senior Management Team.

Concluding Thoughts - What Next?

Our journey into MLEs has been slow and deliberate from the beginning. We have looked for a model that *what would work best for our students*. After establishing 3 x MLEs and changing how we teach and learn, the natural next step is looking into Collaborative Teaching and what the benefits are for our students.

Change happens, just look at telephones, cars, most electrical appliances, automation of work place, etc... We need to embrace change and look for ways to give our students the very best preparation for a work place that is forever changing at an increasing pace.

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- * Waikato Principals Association - Road Trip to Auckland 2017
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References:

- * *Collaborative Teaching and Learning in FLS* - workshop by Neil O'Reilly held in Auckland
- * *The Nature of Learning - Innovative Learning Project*. Dumont, Istance and Benavides
- * *The Key Components to Creating Effective Teaching Environments* - a thesis by Neil O'Reilly
- * *Primary and Secondary Staff PD - Neil O'Reilly* - YouTube Presentation
- * *Collaborative Teaching* - Chris Bradbee