

What are the impacts of digital and collaborative learning in an ILE?

**Sabbatical Report** (Term 3, 2018)

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## **Theme:**

To research digital and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning in an innovative learning environment that is culturally responsive to accelerate learning for Māori and Pasifika students.

## **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to acknowledge the opportunity of a term sabbatical made possible from the TeachNZ scheme. This allowed me the opportunity to stop and reflect on my leadership and how this impacts on the school, my family and my well being.

My particular thanks to the Board of Trustees of St Anne's Catholic School for supporting my application and allowing me the time to rejuvenate and spend quality time with my young family.

Special thanks to Joanne and Jocelyn who took up the role of Acting Principal, you offered amazing support to the staff and school, and progressed the school over the term. Thank you for allowing me the time. To the staff who supported each other and took further leadership roles.

To the schools I visited, thank you for your time and open sharing.

## **Background Information:**

I am in my fourteenth year in the role of Principal and my fourth year as Principal of St Anne's Catholic School, Manurewa, Auckland. We are a medium to large full primary school of 560 to 580 pupils. The major ethnicities in our school are Samoan, Tongan, Filipino, Assyrian, Maori and Cook Island.

In 2016 our school was rebuilt into an innovative learning environment. We have seven learning hubs with three teachers in each hub.

Previously, the teaching staff had limited access to digital devices and were at the beginning of their Google journey. Since the rebuild, the Board has funded and leased over 450 chromebooks and ipads for teaching use. We have funded extensive professional development with Cognition Education Group, Flipped Learning, ULearn and within our Community of Learning.

In my sabbatical, I wanted to reflect on the effective ways to use digital technology for the benefit of our pupils?

The innovative learning environment offers opportunities to learn differently within these spaces. This has offered us an exciting challenge to push the boundaries of learning, reshape our pedagogy and refine our collaborative learning approaches to best support our Pasifika and Maori pupils.

### **Links to our Strategic Direction 2018 - 2020:**

Strategic Goal 2: Implement an innovative learning environment that engages and motivates our students to learn.

### **Rationale for Inquiry:**

- Through this inquiry I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness, of the use of digital and collaborative approaches.
- To gain an outside view of the use of technology and its benefits.
- To clarify how technology within an ILE benefits our Pasifika and Maori pupils.
- To help alter or cement any changes to the strategic direction of the school.

### **Methodology:**

There were four parts to my sabbatical inquiry including:

- Observation and reflection on the effective use of technology in my own school.
- Observation and reflection on the effective use of technology in another Auckland School (similar size and ethnicity).
- Observation and reflection on the effective use in two schools in the Cook Islands.
- Conversations and discussions with teachers and Principals.

### **Findings and Implications:**

It is often through vicarious experiences we get to truly define what works for pupils. I had the opportunity to visit schools to observe and discuss digital learning with staff and pupils who are in an ILE. Two of the schools were similar with regards to high Pasifika students, number of Maori students, access to digital devices and roll size. The other

two schools are in the Cook Islands, new to ILE, with limited access to digital devices and internet infrastructure.

When collating the observations and discussions, the common threads across the schools were the following:

### **Personalized Learning**

Pupils learning at their own pace, though at a level that is challenging. Having work online lets the pupils both increase their learning pace and fold back if needed, with access to videos and exemplars.

### **Collaborative Learning**

Pupils can work together to solve problems, this can help a pupil understand new learning, share resources quickly from teacher and pupils, offers real time feedback for pupils to continue their learning.

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

A key support that created excellent benefits was using a Tuakana Teina approach, both online and in person. This is where pupils coach and mentor another with reflective questions. This happens formatively while the pupils are in the process of learning. This allows greater reflection and for the pupil to action new learning straight away.

Pupils can track their own progress, monitor their shifts and set new goals. This was noted on the digital platform and on the pupils learning site. There was a real strength in Student Agency.

### **On-line Support**

The digital platform allowed the pupils to re-watch or reread information or videos over again. This allowed them more opportunities to acquire the skills or knowledge they are needing to solve problems. For some of our pupils they are too shy to ask questions in a large group, the online questions and comment area gave them opportunities to take a risk to ask and become more confident in doing so.

### **On-line Expert**

Pupils like to feel connected with the teacher and enjoy having the teacher model new learning. This includes an online presence of the teacher modelling instead of an unknown person. They know their teacher's mannerisms and how they explain. Therefore it allows them to just focus on the content with no other new learning obstructions.

### **Quality of Presentation**

Access to digital learning tools helped the pupils to deliver a quality and professional presentation. The pupils spoke with a sense of pride about their work and were very willing to share. The teachers who had spent time on discussing effective presentation options, said their pupils had become more selective in the information and how they presented it. They felt it was more clear and precise.

### **High Engagement**

Pupils felt a sense of success that correlated to the continued online support set up by the teachers. There was more time on learning as there were multiple ways to access support when needed e.g teacher exemplars, student exemplars, teacher videos and online links. Some teachers were able to relate the learning to the student by connecting to their culture, personal lives, experiences and aspirations of the learner. This provides purpose and motivation to gain new skills and knowledge. The pupils like to share who they are and what makes them special.

### **For the Pupils:**

Pupils are generally positive about digital learning. They can articulate how it benefits them and the positive impact on their learning. They know their goals, progress and what needs to be learnt. There is a sense of balance by the pupils, who also enjoy speaking with the teachers and each other. They also do enjoy being creative and working on paper. Getting the right mix is important for motivation and engagement.

The pupils spoke about enjoying collaborative learning in groups. They were able to support and learn from each other. They felt this type of learning meant all of their friends would be successful too. It helped to create a positive environment which is important for the pupils. The teachers played an important role here by teaching and upskilling the pupils on how to interact successfully in groups. When the roles for each pupil were defined and the types of questions to be used modelled, the pupils felt the group was more successful. They knew how to interact positively to meet the common goal.

### **For the Parents:**

Access to devices at home was an issue. One pupil spoke of how her Dad was so emotional seeing his wife and her learn together, using one of the teacher's videos on a small device, that he bought her a laptop. Having access to a device and internet wifi is a barrier and one teachers are trying to overcome, by opening up the classes for device access during non-class time. There was a sense of pride with parents having the

opportunity to read their child's work and actively giving feedback. Two of the schools also offered workshops for parents to learn how to use the platforms so that they could interact with their child's learning.

### **For the Teachers:**

There is a lot to learn for the teacher, including various online programmes and how to use these. Time is needed in setting up the learning platforms and supporting the pupils to understand the process that is to follow. Having half the class for two years seemed to balance this out and aided the next years' class getting up to speed quickly.

Time to read and give feedback to all pupils is difficult. The use of digital devices has increased the amount of work to read and respond to. Teachers in an ILE developed a system to record who they have supported to share the load and to cover all pupils. This has helped decrease time for them and better response time for the pupil.

### **For the School:**

Funding of devices is an ongoing issue, in-particular to the overseas schools. Both schools currently had limited access to technology. The cost and speed of the internet was also a barrier on the island. The schools had begun implementing plans to raise funds and were in contact with an ICT company to provide well priced devices.

Within New Zealand, leasing would seem the best option when considering the ongoing changes in technology. However this comes with a cost, as purchasing is a lot cheaper. One school mostly leased their devices, with a partial roll over of devices each year. This allowed them to have a third of their devices brand new each year.

The other school purchased outright. Devices were used for 4 to 5 years before being replaced. Though this saved money, the fleet is older technology and many were broken.

The types of devices used in both schools were similar. The younger pupils tended to use ipads, while from Year 4 upwards chromebooks were more readily available. The use of digital devices and personalised learning increased as the pupils moved up year levels through the school.

Neither school allowed BYOD. The schools felt BYOD created other barriers and issues including stolen machines, insurance issues, internet password access etc. The schools wanted fairness for all pupils and provide nearly 1:1 access from Year 5 to Year 8.

## **Conclusions:**

I believe my sabbatical has confirmed that our current direction does meet the needs of our pasifika and Maori learners. I have gained a better understanding of the strategies to be used, that will lead to more effective digital and collaborative learning in our innovative learning environments. There does need to be a right mix of digital and paper learning to engage the pupils and to develop the various social collaboration they enjoy. We are in a great place to push the boundaries even further with the use of digital technology.

## **References:**

CORE Education - <http://www.core-ed.org/>

Cognition Education Group - <https://cognitioneducation.com/>

South Auckland Catholic Schools Community of Learning - [Vision](#)