

# Kate Stevenson

## Sabbatical Report

2018

*“Student should become self-directed, lifelong learners, especially as they are preparing for jobs that do not yet exist, to use technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve problems that are not yet even recognised as problems.” The Nature of learning, 2012.*

### Topic:

To research how we can **empower** our learners using **agency** so that they can actively drive their own learning in preparation for a world of constant change.

What is **Student Agency** and how can its practice support learning for children in preparation for a world of constant change?

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### Rationale and Background Information:

Our Tokanui School Strategic Plan aims to raise the achievement of our priority learners; in particular Maori and boys who are disproportionately underachieving in writing. The New Zealand Curriculum (2007), states that we are developing children to be, “young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners.” Our school Strategic Goals are also based around this.

We are at a time in Education where we are moving from a system of rote learning and content acquisition to 21st Century skills that are needed to help students thrive in today’s and tomorrow’s world. These skills include: creativity, curiosity and a growth mindset. “We know employers view these social and emotional skills as just as important as technical skills,” Justine Munro, (co founder of 21 Century Lab, which has been set up to encourage New Zealand’s education system to recognise the importance of the 21st Century skill set and to look at what we are teaching and how it relates to the jobs and workplaces of the future). If we are to also prepare our young people for their future outside of paid work but also for life, we must also build skills in responsibility, teamwork, curiosity, leadership and resilience. “Evidence show these

competencies are enablers for life and work success.” Education Review, Vol 8 2017, Curious and Creative - the New Wave of 21C Kiwi Kids.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research, “suggests that a future-focused education system is one that allows every learner to engage in lifelong learning.” Education Review, Vol 8 2017, Curious and Creative - the new Wave of 21C Kiwi Kids.

In the last decade, I have seen teachers working harder than ever to try to support those students who are struggling with Literacy and Mathematics. The fun has gone out of the classroom and there has become no time for learning spontaneously. We have to find better ways to engage our students and make the learning meaningful and fun again and at the same time useful for the future that they are growing up in.

### **What is Student Agency?**

Learners have agency when they have control over the elements that may restrict their learning.

According to Kate Brown, who spoke at this years’ Energize Conference held in Rolleston, this involves:

- Development of the Key Competencies
- Choice of Context or Topic
- Place of Learning
- Collaboration in learning
- Method of processing learning
- Time to learn
- Co-construction of learning goals
- Role of the expert learner/teacher
- Purpose of the learning
- Next steps: metacognition

### **What did I find out?**

To fully enable student agency we have to consider and review the learning environment and the way that we teach. True learner agency comes about in an Innovative Learning Environment where there is the flexibility to move furniture easily for changing situations, where teachers and students can work collaboratively and where there is a growth mindset that encourages ‘making’ and accepts that making mistakes is part of finding the best solution and achieving real growth. Learner Agency involves addressing real, authentic situations in a global environment that can be accessed through technology. Empowered students can take a lead in their learning throughout their lives.

“Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything.” A J Juliani, 2017.

John Spencer talks about ‘Making’ being the concept. When a child returns home from school each day they should be able to tell their parents or caregivers what they made today. He talks about ‘Design thinking’ being the process. If we have authentic situations where our children are problem solving and designing to make something real, then we will be developing the skills needed for the 21st Century learner in an environment where they are engaged in the learning and wanting to continue with the learning even when they are no longer in the classroom. The learning goes on at home, in the weekend and education becomes seamless. We will be teaching them skills that they can use across other situations and areas of their life.

### **Design thinking has 7 steps:**

1. Look, listen and learn - this involves tapping into the students’ sense of curiosity
2. Students ask lots of questions

3. Students own the research process or problem
4. Apply new knowledge to create solutions - research, analysis, work collaboratively or individually
5. The children are the Maker - create a prototype
6. Refine their work - what is working and what needs fixing. Self and peer assessment
7. Launch/send to an authentic audience

**Failing** on its own isn't productive but failing your way to success is. We need to build grit and resilience into our students. The 'can-do' attitude that has got New Zealand so far in the past, is essential to continue learning and succeeding. Failing is a part of the process.

So how do we teach children that failing really is OK and that it is a part of the process to success and learning? Teach children about the 'Learning Pit'. The Learning Pit is used to promote a Growth Mindset and was developed by James Nottingham. The Learning Pit gives a good framework for children to understand the process they need to go through to learn new information. It helps them to plan, review and talk about their learning.

As found by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, there are different broad pedagogical approaches that can help to develop **adaptive expertise**, which involves the ability to apply meaningfully-learned knowledge and skills flexibly and creatively in different situations:

- **Guided Learning** - the teacher takes control of all aspects of learning
  - **Action Learning** - Learners are more involved in determining the objectives of the learning, organisation and planning
  - **Experiential Learning** - is not controlled by the teacher and there are no predetermined objectives. The learning is determined by context and the activities which people are involved in.
- There needs to be a balance of these approaches and teachers need to move in and out of the various approaches as the need requires.

**Flipped Learning** - is a way to describe Experiential Learning in the classroom. This is an approach that allows true Student Agency. The four pillars of FLIP are:

**Flexible Environment** - The environment can be easily rearranged to suit the learning. It is able to support individual or group learning. There are flexible expectations of the students timelines to complete the tasks or project.

**Learning Culture** - it involves a learner centred culture rather than a teacher centre. The teacher creates rich learning opportunities by providing opportunities for the students to research in-depth. The learning is personally meaningful to the learner.

**Intentional Context** - The teacher is continually working out how they can help students develop contextual understanding. They discover what they need to teach and what students need to explore. It is student centred.

**Professional Educator** - the Professional Educator is even more important as the teacher is continually questioning, observing, evaluating and making decisions about next steps. The teacher is reflective and collaborative with the other Professional Educator to enable improvement in instruction. They are still the essential ingredient to allow the learning to occur.

Students are more **motivated to learn** when:

- they are in a positive, calm emotional state.
- They see the connection between their actions and achievement.
- They have a can do attitude.

- They see the purpose of the learning and value what they are learning.
- They will be more persistent in their learning when they can manage their resources and they can have an influence.

When visiting one of the schools in Wellington that used the **Garden to Table programme**, the students got to share what they had been learning in a way that suited them. They set up the dining room and wrote up on the whiteboard what they wanted to share. They owned the learning and could explain how they were being sustainable and had adapted the recipe to use the ingredients that they had available to them.

I also witnessed the use of **Action Stations** to adapt Play-based Learning for an older group of students. The children had choice about what station they worked at with the only rule being that no more than a certain number of children could be at any action station at one time. The focus of the learning was about sharing, oral language and negotiating.

For children to be working independently and managing their own learning their needs to be systems in the learning space to track their learning and earn the trust of the Professional Educator. There are various ways that can be adopted to show different levels of trust and independence. I believe that adopting a system for across the whole school can avoid confusion and enable teachers to talk about what the levels of trust is, giving this process more meaning. At one school that I visited the **Levels of Trust and Responsibility** that influenced what parameters were in place were based on the growth of a seed to a young plant.

He Kākano - seed/pip - I am working on . . . .

He Pihinga - Shoot/young plant/seedling - I mostly . . . .

Māhuri - young tree/sapling - I always . . . .

If you are at the Māhuri stage, you have greater freedom of choice. This could include where you can work which may be in outside locations or anywhere in the school including the library. While those at the he kākana stage may be restricted to a certain part of the learning space or may need to complete tasks in a certain order or check in with the teacher daily to show what they have achieved.

**Collaborative Team Teaching** allows for manageability of Student Agency in the Experiential Learning Model. Collaborative Team Teaching provides teachers with the opportunity to rove, observe, question and assess where to take the learning next. Collaborative Team Teaching doesn't just happen smoothly by two teachers deciding to work together; both teachers must come to a mutual agreement that they are equals in the classroom. Making decisions as a team is a key component of a strong partnership. Open communication is the key to a successful partnership.

Collaborative Team Teaching provides the children with the opportunity to connect with different personalities. There is more time for small group and one-on-one learning. Planning together encourages two teachers to bounce ideas off each other and come up with more creative and better learning opportunities for the students. The teachers model behaviours for the children. They see them interacting in a peer-to-peer situation and they learn what is appropriate for them to do in a similar situation when working with others. This helps them to understand the power of respect amongst peers.

A new school that was developed in San Diego with a focus on teachers and students at the centre of everything, has been a successful example of a collaborative learning environment that was designed with a commitment for innovation. It encourages collaborative learning, taking risks and sharing ideas. It is a grass-roots, student driven education system where students are encouraged to pursue special interests. It has been so successful that it has become a leader, locally and Nationally. "In 2017 it surpassed all other schools in it's district on school climate and student well-being indicators. In 2018, the middle school was

ranked as the highest performing in the district.” Nora Fleming, 2018. When these students went to high school they outshone their peers in areas like creativity, collaboration and leadership.

Every child learns at a different pace. No one is average. Average doesn't fit anyone. Let children take the controls and help them to navigate the way. Let them follow their passion and support them to extend this. Build them into lifelong learners.

Success for Collaborative Team Teaching learning spaces is dependant on open minded professional educators and a willingness to compromise.

The front pages of the New Zealand Curriculum is held in high esteem around the world. We can develop the use of the **Key Competencies** to grow independent lifelong learners.

Research done by Google backs this up. In 2013 google tested its hiring hypothesis. What was a shock to everyone at the conclusion of Project Oxygen it was found that, among the 8 most important qualities of Google's top employees, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) expertise came in last. Top characteristics of success at Google are soft skills:

- Being a good coach
- Communicating and listening well
- Possessing insights into others
- Having empathy toward and being supportive of one's colleagues
- Being a good critical thinker and problem solver
- Being able to make connections across complex ideas

“STEM skills are vital to the world we live in today, but technology alone, as Steve Jobs famously insisted, is not enough. We desperately need the expertise of those who are educated to the human, cultural, and social as well as the computational.” Valarie Strauss, Dec 2017.

## **Conclusion**

### **What does my research mean for Tokanui School?**

- We will use the new Modern Learning Environment classroom as a team teaching space when the roll allows
- Include Play-based learning in our Junior programme
- Educate our families about how we are catering to 21st Century learners
- Our property projects moving forward will include putting in breakout spaces, shared by classrooms to encourage more collaborative teaching throughout the school
- Provide some school-wide Action Stations. This could involve modifying the current Clubs programme
- Introduce the levels of trust and responsibility to the teachers. Set up a school wide expectation
- Be flexible with the use of furniture and provide some modern furniture that can be easily moved
- Provide writing surfaces in all classrooms that encourage problem solving, teamwork and collaboration
- Use the ‘Learning Pit’ model to encourage our learners to be resilient and accept that to be learning and growing they have to get into the pit and work their way out

- Find school-wide authentic opportunities. Grow our enviroschools projects and involve all children in Enviroschools. Work with real problems and situations.
- Tune in to what interests our students, taking particular note of what interests our boys and Maori children.

“Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything.” A J Juliani

“Empowered students are enabled to own their learning forever.” John Spencer

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