



# **HAVELOCK NORTH PRIMARY**

*Empowering Learners for Life*  
**TŪ MANA TŪ KAHA TŪ TANGATA**

## **Principal Sabbatical Report 2018**

**"How innovative learning pedagogies are catering for the well-being of students and improving outcomes for priority learners"**

Nick Reed

**Havelock North Primary School (HNPS)**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I feel incredibly fortunate to have been provided the opportunity to visit many amazing schools and meet highly motivated leaders, teachers and kids along the way. It was a real bonus to have the time to reflect on my own practice and our school as a whole. I would like to acknowledge the twelve schools I visited during this time thank them for sharing their experiences with me.

Thank you to the the HNPS board of trustees for supporting my sabbatical and to the Ministry of Education and TeachNZ for providing this fantastic initiative.

A special thank you to my Deputy Principal Shona Burrough for stepping into the principal role during my absence and doing a great job. I would also like to acknowledge our management team, board and the wider staff for supporting Shona during this time.

## **Executive Summary**

The media has not always painted a rosy picture of innovative learning environments (ILE's). I would suggest this negative publicity is possibly justified in some cases as careful planning and a shared philosophy needs to be in place in order for these spaces to be successful. It's a complex business and a number of schools have simply changed their "game plan" overnight without undertaking the necessary thought processes to enable a successful transition. The challenge for many schools is to get their communities on board, particularly those higher decile schools, where typically parents are happy to question. Everyone's an expert in education as to it is the one thing we have all done. Many successful parents look back on their own schooling and see the need to have this type of education replicated for their own children. Change is often seen as a threat, particularly when this change is often happening very quickly without a lot of consultation and evidence to support it.

Ultimately this report describes my findings from visiting a number of outstanding schools, talking with principals, leaders, teachers and students. I focus on twelve concepts associated with innovative learning and try to provide both theory and practical ideas to support best performance in these areas. Many of these are the "glue" which leads to successful practice not only in an ILE environment but teaching in general. Of course I'm merely skimming the surface, but hopefully some of these ideas and resources will ultimately lead to better outcomes for students.

## **Purpose**

The focus for my sabbatical is, "how innovative learning pedagogies are catering for the well-being of students and improving outcomes for priority learners". Like many New Zealand Schools, Havelock North Primary School is going through a change process. Much of our five year property allowance (5YA) is targeted towards creating flexible learning spaces. I need to broaden my knowledge around ILP to ensure the children and staff at Havelock North Primary are well served and are given the best possible leadership to ensure these future transitions are effective.

There is a need for me to scrutinize innovative learning practices and invite schools to share (teachers and students) the impact these pedagogies are having on their learners, particularly those "hard to move" priority learners. Russell Bishop from Waikato University suggests, "the answers to improvements in Maori education do not lie in the mainstream". I will attempt to uncover how ILP's are assisting students

to make connections across the curriculum, with their strong personalised approach (e.g. where Māori achieve success as Māori). I am interested to discover how schools are moving students from a state of reliance to one where students recognise that they can make powerful choices and can act with purpose. Where learners move from being extrinsically to intrinsically motivated.

New Zealand's traditional system, is a 'one-size-fits-all' model where the teacher is the holder of the knowledge and students have been passive recipients. Graham Nuttall in his book "The Hidden Lives of Learners" wrote about how in traditional classrooms students already know 40-50% of what they are being taught.

Wellbeing is topical at present and for good reason. Many schools are developing pedagogies to enhance wellbeing for students and staff and this is of particular interest to me. National surveys show the profession is not in good heart and many teachers are disillusioned and stressed out. Numbers entering the profession are at all time low and we need to find a way of making teaching a viable option for talented school leavers.

Bullying is said to be rife in many schools and this has been acknowledged in research. Dr Vanessa Green, Head of Victoria University's School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, along with a team of postgraduate students, surveyed 860 teachers and senior staff from primary, intermediate and secondary schools around New Zealand about their experiences with, perceptions of, and attitudes towards bullying.

"The majority of teachers and senior school management personnel are concerned, and there is a general feeling that we need to do something about it," says Dr Green. The statistics listed below demonstrate why wellbeing and bullying is such a focal point in this country at present;

- 94% of NZ teachers said bullying occurs at their school
- Around 45% of NZ teachers and staff said verbal & social/relational bullying was brought to their attention once a week, while 25% heard of physical bullying once a week
- 46% believe cyber-bullying occurs mainly between the ages of 11-14

### **Rationale and Background Information**

We live in rapidly changing times where school buildings are changing to reflect the 21st Century. According to the MOE website, "Most schools were built between the 1950s and 1970s. The way that teachers teach and students learn has been developing since then. We want all schools to have vibrant, well connected, innovative learning environments (ILE) that encourage and support many different types of learning".

We are seeing more and more children leave secondary school disengaged and it is important that we make school relevant to our learners. I include the work of Gerstein (2014) in the table below, where you can see the clear difference in pedagogy between traditional learning and that of a 21st century learner. This is a huge transition for many teachers and is one that needs a lot of collective professional discussion and scaffolding in order for this to be a successful transition. However it is a key part of "hooking" kids into the learning process.

Our own New Zealand Curriculum turns learning on its head according to Dr. Julia Aitken. Typically overtime, content has been the focus and students have simply been passive consumers of this content. The New Zealand curriculum allows for the

development of the whole child with the key competencies and values supporting and shaping a content based curriculum. Aitken makes reference to a secondary school science teacher where she says, “formerly the teacher’s job was to teach science plain and simple. Now this teacher’s job is to educate the whole person, developing their competencies and values, but through a science lens”.

New Zealand has a much publicised “educational tail”. These students are our priority learners are often disengaged with our system and something needs to change to address this. Relationships are at the heart of everything. As George Couros states in his book *Innovator’s Mindset*, “fifty years ago relationships were the most important thing in schools, and in fifty years from now it will be no different” (Couros 2015).

As mentioned earlier the table below makes reference to the difference between the traditional and the 21st century learner. The personalised approach on the left is clearly far more engaging for the learner.

What are the differences between a traditional learner – which most teachers can associate with, and a 21st century learner?

<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner</b>	<b>Traditional Learner</b>
Learner as the centre of instruction	Content as the centre of instruction
Educator as a coach, mentor, guide, resource and lead learner	Teacher as the expert and deliverer of content, tests, assignments and discipline
Use of the internet to get pluralistic, broad perspective of a topic	Use of a single textbook to teach the subject
Failure and mistakes are seen as part of the learning process	Perfection is explicitly and implicitly expected by and for both students and teachers
Differentiated and personalized curriculum	One size fits all curriculum
Ongoing, formative assessments for and by students to increase learning	Summative assessments for accountability of teachers and the school
Learning is multi-sensory, hands-on, authentic and relevant	Learning is typically only focused with only the brain in mind, sometimes not seen as relevant by the students
Learners produce as well as consume content	Students spend most of their time consuming content created by others
Learners doing more talking and working than the educator in class time	Teachers do most of the work and talking during class time
Technology seamlessly integrated into the curriculum	Technology as an add-on, specialty or after-thought
Misbehaviour is viewed as an opportunity for growth and often resolved through group effort	Misbehaviour is disciplined by the teacher
Social emotional learning is seen as integral to educating the whole child	Social emotional learning minimally or not integrated into learning.

*Gerstein 2014*

As Maori make up a large contingent of our priority student number, it is worth considering the work of the Ka Hikitia and Tataiako documents. The Ka Hikitia document stipulates the importance of the teacher-learner relationship which supports what Couros was saying: "Evidence shows that high-quality teaching is the most important influence the education system can have on high-quality outcomes for students with diverse learning needs. Evidence also shows that effective teaching

and learning depends on the relationship between teachers and students and students' active engagement" (Ka Hikitia -Accelerating Success 2013-2017).

Ka Hikitia also stresses the importance of identity, language and culture – teachers knowing where their students come from, and building on what students bring with them; and on productive partnerships among teachers, Maori learners, whanau, and iwi.

These principles form the basis of Tataiako which is imperative for all teachers to have a strong grasp of. These competencies are about knowing, respecting, and working with Maori learners and their whanau so they can aspire to be great citizens who contribute strongly to our society. What's also clear from research is that what works for Maori works for everyone.

Many teachers and students are highly stressed and anxiety is prevalent in our society. We need to work smarter and reduce the pressure on individuals so that the "soft skills" identified in our curriculum can come to the fore. Yes academic achievement is important, but equally so is the personal development of the individual. National Standards and the competitive bias it created within and between schools, saw principals and teachers try and squeeze every bit of juice out of staff and students to improve results in reading, writing and maths. Education is far more than just reading, writing and maths.

According to Osborne (2014), "a crucial part of successful change leadership is avoiding an approach which leads to change being done to people and embracing an approach which empowers and enables people to contribute to, and to see themselves in, the change they are bringing about".

In order to do this Osborne talks about reflecting on how staff and leadership teams are supporting each other through 1st (technical and an extension from the past) and 2nd order change (adaptive and a break from the past) Walters and Marzano 2006. Osborne suggests for schools to be successful they need to provide staff with:

- A purpose to believe in
- The skills required to change
- Reinforcement systems
- Role models

Well designed environments allow students to learn in a whole raft of ways such as learning with peers, with the teacher, working in a quiet space, sitting, standing and collaborating. Even back in 1996 Sergiovanni suggested, "the ideal collaborative workplace would enable teachers to work, debate, plan and problem solve together, observe one another's lessons and sharing successes as well as challenges.

### **Activities undertaken**

During my sabbatical I visited twelve schools from around the North Island who had all been immersed in innovative learning pedagogy and flexible learning spaces (FLS) for some time. During my time I undertook the following:

- Discussions with principals and teachers
- Recorded student voice
- Read a range of research
- Listened to TED talks
- Reflected on my current practice and thinking

## **Findings**

According to Osborne (2013), “Modern learning environments that align better with what we know about the brain and student learning can facilitate traditional pedagogies such as direct instruction if needed, but they typically offer students and teachers much more flexibility, openness and access to resources.

It is difficult to argue that these new quality spaces we are now seeing are far more glamorous and suited to learning than what many of us were subject to during our school days. However a space is simply a space and the one key aspect that shone through from my research was the importance of successful pedagogy. I have identified twelve points or concepts for consideration in potentially leading to better outcomes for all stakeholders.

### **1. Collaboration**

Hattie (2015) discusses the need to increase collegiality & collaboration in our education system. He states, “traditionally classrooms have had a closed door. Being ‘islands’ where no one else, other than the teacher and students, know what is going on in there. We need to change this mentality into one that is more open, team oriented, working together collaboratively. This means classrooms need to be more open and we (teachers) need to be more willing to learn from each other. This must be done, not in a judgemental way of ‘fixing the teacher’, but in a way that acknowledges teachers have the expertise to offer and that we can all learn from each other to become better”.

Simply put, what is collaboration? Welcome Bay School in Tauranga had come up with their understanding of collaboration. This version was tweaked several times until they settled on, “Collaboration is creating a community who are all working towards a common goal and vision, drawing on strengths, sharing ideas and learning from and with each other”.

Kahane 2017 describes the challenges associated with collaboration when he states, “This challenge is becoming more acute. People are more free and individualistic and so much more diverse, with more voice and less deference. Their identities and affiliations are more fluid. Enabled by new technologies, established political, organizational, social, and familial hierarchies are breaking down. Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity are growing”.

The journey toward successful collaboration, teaching and learning is clearly a demanding one. As Kahane points out people are more willing to question and we are perhaps not as respectful as we once were. Everyone has an opinion which I guess is potentially a good thing.

In order to develop successful collaboration, there were some of the key messages I took from schools;

- Establishing a clear vision first and foremost and aligning everything to this vision
- Establishing great systems. These often varied between schools and learning communities
- Employing outside experts to assist in areas such as growth mindset and visioning
- Visiting other schools to gain knowledge and insight
- Establishing and refining leadership, teaching and learning practice
- Grouping students/teachers into learning communities

- Educating whanau through honest and frank discussions around the benefits and challenges
- Listening
- Having fun together
- Being brutally honest
- Accessing quality research
- Recognising the importance that we need to change because the skills children need tomorrow are different to those we received during our education

Schools had different approaches to developing ILEs. Some admitted to falling on their sword through rushing the process and learnt lessons along the way. Most of these schools had gone through a cycle of change and were now much more deliberate and planned when selecting collaborations. Some schools had a range of questions they posed to teachers who were interested in teaching collaboratively. They felt it was important for every teacher to consider how they they operated so that management could then assist with the grouping of teachers. Some of these questions included the following;

- What are your passions/areas of strength?
- What are your weaker aspects of teaching?
- How do I prefer to plan?
- How do I feel about grouping?
- How tidy do I need my space to be before I can function properly?
- How quiet do I need our Learning Community (LC) to be?
- What time do I normally get to school?
- What days can I stay after school to meet?
- What's the latest I'm happy to stay on these days when we meet together?
- How do I like to prepare for each day?
- How and when do we want conversations about our learners to take place?
- How do I process new ideas, information, etc.?
- When is a good time to discuss these?
- How well do I know the strengths of my LC buddy(ies)?
- What is my preferred way of receiving ideas/feedback from colleagues?
- What is my preferred way of giving feedback?
- If my LC buddy had a concern/issue and wanted to raise it with me, how would I prefer this to be done?
- How well do I identify and manage my stress and/or stressful situations?

From my observations it seemed those schools that operated a more organic model were the most successful in terms of the collaborations surviving. Rather than force people into team teaching they let it happen naturally. They found once there were one or two successful collaborations in existence other teachers became inquisitive and wanted to try it out for themselves. This meant these schools were also in a position to slowly build up the trust of the community. Having passionate, successful models within their own environment was imperative to school-wide success.

One school who operated a "power of two" model felt their classrooms were personalised and not all the same. It was felt this allowed for creativity and being more organic. This school felt having two teachers and a range of kids had been positive. They considered it doubled the chance of forming relationships with

teachers and students. All classes were multi level allowing one of the teachers to follow through with the cohort the next year. Mikaere-Wallis (2016) would support this thinking as he suggests often in schools wasted as too much time in the first term forming relationships. He is an advocate a teacher following a cohort right throughout their schooling.

While all schools were supportive of collaborative teaching teams, none of them insisted that this was the only model of teaching throughout the school. In most cases it was what was deemed “best practice” and teachers who had worked collaboratively did not want to go back to the more traditional approach.

Two schools were considering having some flexible options next year as they felt there were certain students who would benefit from working in a smaller, more traditional space with one teacher. However the single cell spaces would still operate through an innovative learning pedagogy lens centred around promoting student agency. There was still an expectation that those who were in single cells would collaborate with other staff around planning and teaching as inquiry.

## **2. Student Agency**

How schools are creating agentic learners? There is a growing evidence around the importance of students being self-managers, being able to demonstrate key learning dispositions (KCs), being safe and secure in their learning, and engaging in collaborative knowledge building. Peter Johnston describes the need (for the development of student agency) clearly. He says that “developing in children a sense of agency is not an educational frill or some mushy-headed liberal idea. Children who doubt their competence set low goals and choose easy tasks, and they plan poorly. When they face difficulties, they become confused, lose concentration, and start telling themselves stories about their own incompetence. In the long run they disengage, decrease effort, generate fewer ideas, and become passive and discouraged. Children with strong belief in their own agency work harder, focus their attention better, are more interested in their studies, and are less likely to give up when they encounter difficulties than children with a weaker sense of agency (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, and Connell 1998). Feeling competent, these children plan well, choose challenging tasks, and set higher goals. Their concentration actually improves when they face difficulties, and in the process of engaging difficulties they learn more skills” (Johnston 2004). Research clearly shows that people do not learn well as “spectators.”

John Spencer and AJ Juliani in their book Empower, talk about how student choice is the heartbeat of ownership and empowerment. They state that, “by the time students get to High School 83% are stressed out, 67% are bored half the time and many play the “game of school”. The authors signal that it is choice that drives ownership of learning. This in turn triggers empowerment which ultimately leads to learning that is “intrinsic, powerful, and deep”.

Choice and voice was clearly evident in all the schools I visited. Students were engaged and were embracing innovative learning practice. Learning was visible to them and they thrived on having ownership of their learning through a personalised approach.

Students were “schooled” about the challenges of learning and in many cases models such as James Nottingham’s “Learning Pit” were evident on classroom walls. The key competencies and school values emphasised the importance of being great



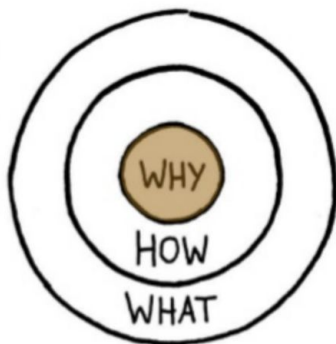
citizens and students knew that part of this was meeting challenges head on with a range of strategies.

Some of the strategies schools were using to develop student agency included:

- Developing strong student/teacher relationships. If a student does not feel accepted by the teacher their motivation to learn will decrease.
- Not too many choice options so students don't feel overwhelmed
- Learning menus
- Clear expectations in place for choice activities so students knew what success looks like.
- Ensure choice activities were meaningful and not just "busy" work
- Homework options
- Genius hour/Passion projects
- Choice of learning goals
- Choice in ways of reporting information
- Choice in where students worked
- Choice in who students work with
- Interest inventories to personalise the learning
- Student class surveys and meetings about the functioning of the class/school

### 3. Clear Vision

Developing a clear vision is central to successful pedagogy. Some schools used outside experts to work with their staff, board and community. Many used tools such as Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle" to assist with their visioning process. They put the school's vision at the centre of the circle as this was what they were all about. Everything on the outer circles needed to align with this vision. If it didn't, then it was not worth spending time on. Every decision made went back to the vision and the ultimate impact on the learners.



### 4. Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of a successful collaborative working environment. Saltmarsh outlines that this is the biggest challenge of innovative learning environments, "In many cases teachers grapple with change and having to consider others in their thinking. The complexities associated with the spaces and the need to have a shared understanding creates tensions". (Saltmarsh et. al 2015)

Some of the ways schools worked to overcome these hurdles were;


- Personality profiles "Perfecting Connecting"
- Asking teachers to list staff they could work with
- Scaffolding how success might look
- Having open discussions (Black and Yellow hat thinking)

- Reducing the number of formal staff meetings to allow time for hubs to meet
- Giving an extra CRT day to hubs each term
- Having staff values awards given out at termly staff functions
- Enabling time for those teaching collaborative to visit other schools
- Invite external expertise
- Celebrating success

## 5. Enhancing Teacher Capability

How can we support teachers to keep getting better at teaching?" We need to identify what the "best practices" to develop in our teachers are, and what they look like. Professor David Hopkins (2009) in Expert Advice: notes that ..."unless you can define practice and make it common, you can't improve the quality of teaching".

In the table below John Hattie (2013), shares his work on effect size. He says typically the things that we debate most in education don't matter much. In fact he gets frustrated because he feels it stops us addressing what really matters in schools. He suggests many of these political issues a merely a distraction from what really makes a difference to learning. In the table below you can see the minimal effect size of things such as technology and class sizes.



Not the home or parents	.25
Not individualized instruction	.22
Not the technology	.22
Not accountability	.22
Not class size	.21
Not learning styles	.17
Not the programs	.16
Not the structure of schools or classes	.10
Not many attributes of the students	.08
Not summer school, length of school day or school year	.07
Not repeating classes	-.13

Typically any effect size greater than .40 is worth investing in. Below we can see the power of collective expertise. Hattie shows here that the biggest effect in our business is the expertise of the teachers. Teachers who work together collectively and collaboratively to understand their impact make the greatest difference to learning outcomes according to Hattie. Knowing the learner and showing them what success looks like upfront, and letting them know it is ok to make mistakes is important. He also suggests it is not the scores in tests that is the most important thing, it is developing a love of learning so that students want to "reinvest" and continue to learn. This is all packaged within a climate of trust.

## The power of passion, and teachers' collective expertise

1.	Teachers, working together, as evaluators of their impact	.93
2.	The power of moving from what students know now towards explicit success criteria	.77
3.	Errors and trust are welcomed as opportunities to learn	.72
4.	Maximize feedback to teachers about their impact	.72
5.	Getting the proportions of surface to deep correct	.71
6.	The Goldilocks principles of challenge, and deliberate practice to attain these challenges	.60

Wells (2014), stated In New Zealand, we are fortunate to have teacher inquiry/research written into our national curriculum document. This asks teachers to ensure they are experimenting with strategies to improve their practice and recording the process and results. The real challenge for us is getting all teachers up to speed and to reduce that gap between our best teachers and the rest. Dr Ryan Dunn from Melbourne University noted that there are four actions that will serve to reduce variation of teacher practice within schools:

- Support the de-privatisation of practice
- Encourage shared problem solving
- Enable discussion around evidence of students learning
- Engage with research-informed approaches.

Teaching as Inquiry has made teachers in this country more accountable. It has certainly opened discussion and got teachers talking about best practice far more than in the past. Hattie talks about the inquisitive teacher and their significant impact on student performance. The inquisitive teacher is naturally immersed in the teaching as inquiry practice. Typical characteristics of the inquisitive teacher are;

- Displays an innovative mindset and continually stretches their practice
- Appreciates challenge and confronting complexity
- Looks for research to support innovative practices
- Seeks to make connections and integrate ideas
- Builds strong social resources collaborating with colleagues both within and outside of their school
- Willing to wrestle with difficult concepts
- Exhibits agency and takes responsibility for their professional learning

Our challenge as principals is clearly obvious. It is the inquisitive teacher that thrives in these innovative learning spaces. There needs to be rigorous discussion and a willingness to try new ideas. We need teachers to be hungry with the drive and passion to make a difference. An example of teachers' being inquisitive and inquiring in their practice was were one school was trialling giving feedback digitally with Year 6 students. Hattie suggests that there is a growing body of literature that suggests

digitally recorded feedback possesses considerable potential. In his work it was identified that a number of advantages were associated with digitally recorded feedback. “These benefits included, overcoming some of the limitations of traditional handwritten feedback, the perception among students of greater depth to recorded feedback, and the potential that this type of commentary makes the thinking of teachers more visible”. (Hattie 2014)

In the schools I visited there were many variations in pedagogy, ranging from the power of two model to learning communities of four to five teachers. Some of the teaching strategies I observed were targeted teaching through a workshop based approach, one teacher teaching while another observed (used for professional development purposes), team teaching with two teacher working together with a larger group of students. This was also effective for building teacher capacity.

Three teachers working together seemed to be the most common closely followed by paired models. A number of schools offered a range of options from single cell rooms to pods of five.

## **6. ICT**

In all schools ICT's were a natural part of the programme. ICT's were seen as “another learning tool” and a way of accessing information and collaborating. Some schools adopted and BYOD approach while others were strictly school owned machines. Google Docs were used extensively, while ipads were used for the more creative aspects of learning. Priority learners were often given support to access information and these children told me they enjoyed working with devices.

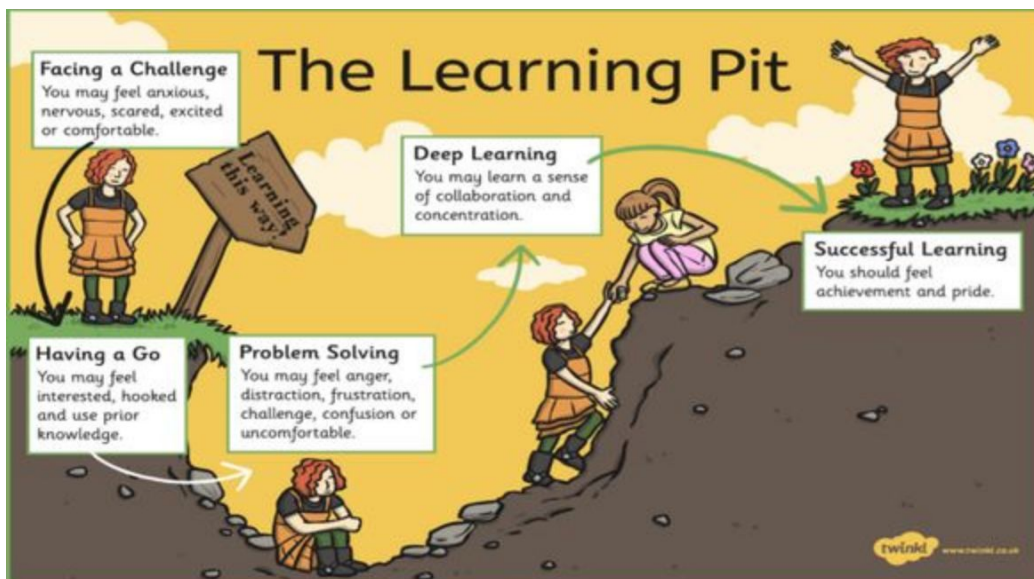
Flipped learning was commonplace. In this setting, teachers made lessons available to students whenever and wherever it is convenient for them. Teachers delivered this instruction by creating videos of themselves teaching so it was always accessible to the class. The feedback from the students was positive about this way of learning. Of particular significance was the fact the students were able to revisit concepts. One student stated, “I like it for maths as often I get stuck and I can go back and check how to do it. It's good that you can go back as many times as you want and you're not always annoying the teacher by getting her to explain it again”.

The jigsaw app was used by many schools and was seen as an effective way of communicating with whanau. Teachers made sure they had a system where there was one or two focus children each day so no one got left out.

Teacher knowledge and confidence with ICT was often seen as a barrier. In most cases school leaders found it important to begin by targeting professional learning on the technical aspects so that teachers could use digital technology with confidence. Whole staff PD often proved ineffective because it did not target teachers' specific individual needs. PD was most effective when it was ongoing and regular. In one school the board made provision for sixteen hours a week of technical support, and one to one PD for staff who required it. These decisions proved to be very effective in supporting change in this particular school as there was nowhere to hide.

## **7. Growth Mindset**

This language was evident in the schools I visited both through visual displays and the language used. Carol Dweck's work was being used to encourage students to take ownership of themselves as learners. This was used in conjunction with James Nottingham's Learning Pit to encourage students to be resilient and recognise that finding new concepts challenging is a natural part of the learning process.



Schools used questions like those below to set students and teachers up for success.

- Do you believe all students can learn?
- How do our students learn best?
- What is most important for our children to be learning?
- How will we respond to children who are not learning?
- Do you like learning?
- Is learning always a simple process?
- What happens when learning is hard?
- How do you define learning?
- How do you know when something has been learned?

These questions applied equally to the teachers as well as students. It is important to understand that learning is finding out what you don't know. "Learning what you don't know is often hard and I often use the mantra – Everything is hard before it is easy". (Dweck 2012)

Steve Gurney, nine time winner of the NZ Coast to Coast race, a gruelling multisport event, said at the Teachers Matter Conference 2015; "I never learned from winning, except to increase my ego. I learned most from losing." This is a really important message for all learners. Somewhere along the line things have become too easy for students. I don't know whether it is that often parents bail them out or don't like to see their child exposed or falling into the "pit". Unfortunately uncertainty and challenges are a big part of everyday life and it is important students are exposed to adversity and have the tools to help them through.

## 8. Utilisation of Spaces

I visited schools which ranging from brand new to many that had been adapted to meet the need. The key to these innovative spaces was flexibility. Students I spoke with were positive about both the pedagogy and the spaces. Some of the important things to them were;

### Breakout Spaces

They liked being able to choose a quiet space if they needed one where they could reflect and focus. Some of these spaces were collaborative breakouts which were seen as positive as the students could discuss their learning without distracting others. Noise is often something that concerns parents about these spaces. A

breakout offers something their child would not normally have access to in an everyday classroom.

### **Learner Licences**

These were varied amongst schools. Some were real advocates of the licence as it meant you needed to earn the right to work in certain areas. Others were less in favour of a licence as they felt it prejudiced priority learners who were likely to remain at a certain level and therefore have limited agency. Schools who did adopt the licence approach agreed this was indeed a challenge. They ensured the licence system was well scaffolded and put supports in place so all learners could experience success. Some of these approaches were:

- Buddy systems
- Allowing all students to access all zones at certain times of the day
- Specific teacher aide focus on priority learners
- One on one teacher time at the beginning of the day to unpack the day ahead
- Lots of positive reinforcement and encouragement
- Involving the kids as student coaches

### **Learning Zones**

Different spaces were allocated for different types of learning. Examples seen were writing corners, collaborative zones, quiet zones, art stations and science stations.

### **Varied Floor Plans**

In many cases students were charged with the task of arranging the spaces for learning and reflecting regularly on the success of this. Often children had a say in deciding what types of furniture would be successful. Some had visited other schools with their teachers and asked other students about what types of furniture was the most functional.

## **9. Learning through Play**

According to the New Zealand Curriculum Framework 2007, “Students will be encouraged to value innovation, inquiry, and curiosity, by thinking critically, creatively and reflectively”.

Learning through play was being explored in eight of the schools I visited. These schools had either a strong or a developing philosophy around play and felt it was paramount that children had the opportunity to follow their own interests and wonderings. They required children will take risks in their play, knowing that there is no right or wrong way. Student voice and choice was also evident within a learning through play environment. The feedback from schools was that LTP enabled a far smoother transition to school for five years olds. This feedback was supported by both preschools and families. Children still received regular instruction in the core learning areas. Data in reading, writing and maths had stayed constant in all cases. The biggest positive was the relationship improvements associated with LTP, resulting in fewer playground issues and a real enhancement of the soft skills such as relating to others, managing self and participating and contributing.

According to Gray, 2013 and Brewer, 2007, The foundations of successful play are;

#### **Play is:**

1. Self-chosen and self-directed;
2. Process rather than product driven;
3. Contains structures or rules established by the players themselves;

4. Imaginative, non-literal and removed from reality;
5. Occurs between those who are active, alert and non-stressed.

This work is also supported by my Nathan Mikaere-Wallis who states, “In primary school, a child only benefits from two-and-a-half hours a day of teacher-led instruction. Anything more has little effect, so the teacher then be “scaffolding the child-led play”.” (Mikaere-Wallis 2018) He says Finland moved up international education tables after implementing that research.

There were however different formats of play on offer from the more conventional free play with “loose parts” to the more structured Walker Learning approach. Walker Learning operated in two of the schools. Under this philosophy two children were the “focus kids” each day. This helped build closer relationships between all stakeholders. Typically each student was a focus child every two weeks. The benefits of this approach are that it personalised learning and engaged students in active learning, alongside explicit and formalised instruction. It is also seen as culturally and developmentally appropriate.

## **10. Well Being**

The World Health Organization has projected that depression will become one of the leading health problems worldwide. Research tells us that more than 75% of mental illnesses emerge during teenage and young adult years, and earlier onsets are associated with worse outcomes. Further research has indicated that student disengagement in learning is increasing and latest figures note that one in five students are disengaged from school. Research shows disengaged students are on average 1–2 years behind their peers.

In 2016 NZEI commissioned a report on principal and teacher wellbeing. It found that work related stress was 1.8 times higher than the general population and that burnout was 70% higher for principals. 73% of teachers felt stressed either half the time for most of the time. The three main factors related to teacher stress were;

- Pressure from management
- Student needs
- Student behaviour

As a result of these statistics, and the suggested benefits offered by programmes such as mindfulness, this practice is becoming a popular mechanism to improve wellbeing, and is being increasingly used in schools. In fact Australia has recently introduced a mindfulness curriculum coupled with an “app” called Smiling Mind. Smiling Mind CEO and one of the developers of the Australian curriculum, Dr Addie Wootten states, “not only are these skills essential for learning but they prepare our children to better manage with work-life challenges in the future.

A recent meta-analysis over 70 studies comparing more than 6,000 school-aged young people showed those who practiced mindfulness demonstrated greater performance in the following areas:

- Better emotion and behaviour regulation than 62% of non-practicing students;
- Better academic performance than 66% of non-practicing students
- Lower depression and anxiety scores than 66% of non-practicing students
- Better social skills than 64% of non-practicing students

The Mindfulness programme was carried out extensively in three of the schools I visited and others were in the process of exploring it further in 2019. <https://mindup.org/> The link to the mindup programme gives access to some

excellent research. The Smiling Mind app <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/> supports the Australian curriculum and provides lessons for teachers.

However Murphy (2018) states, “Offering mindfulness classes for staff won't necessarily work if the cause of their stress is excessive workload and a lack of time. Trying to build culture by having staff events may flop if they are too tired to stay up beyond 8.30pm and having gratitude times at staff meetings may become contrived when staff relationships have become frayed”.

Staff wellbeing is vitally important to schools and it was generally felt that modern learning approaches were assisting with teacher wellbeing from the viewpoint that they were able to support one another and own any issues collectively. Initially implementing this pedagogy created more work, but as things evolved there was more time to plan, assess and work with priority learners.

From a school perspective there is certainly a realisation nationally that wellbeing for both staff and students is under the microscope. One school had spent a lot of time focusing on wellbeing and this work was largely driven by their board of trustees. The school's board had spent considerable funds and felt the effort and money spent was worth the investment. Their philosophy was that, “teacher wellness promotes student wellness which in turn raises student achievement” (Board co-Chair).

Initially their work started with a independent survey carried which showed that teachers were stressed and had a relatively low level of job satisfaction. As a result of these findings the school started to talk a lot about ways to promote wellness. They sent all staff off to visit a range of schools they presented their feedback when they returned.

Some of the initiatives they have undertaken as a school include;

- Subsidising (50%) school staff jackets
- Mid winter dinner staff functions which included partners too with no cost to staff
- Birthday afternoons off (release was covered in house)
- Family friendly week, once a term no meetings (where possible)
- Team building including all staff at teacher only days
- Set up a wellness committee
- Employing a consulting company to provide direction
- Some staff meetings were optional
- The Board co-chairs made sure the principal's wellness was being looked after. It was felt the principal was in a position that his family was missing out due to his huge commitment to the school. Discussions were had with their auditor to find out was appropriate. A gift voucher for dinner out and movies tickets were given to principal along with a letter expressing the board's appreciation.

As a result of this initiative it has been noted there are now fewer sick days and recent surveys have seen a dramatic increase in staff satisfaction.

Other schools were doing some similar things, particularly around reducing the numbers of meetings. They had a number of social events and some provided the teachers with a free lunches at coaching sessions which were held offsite.

Murphy (2018) suggests it is now time to be “strategically proactive about fostering a culture of care within your organisation”. This needs to be a three pronged triadic approach according to Murphy embracing the following three elements.



- Review - looking at internal structures to identify areas of potential pain and gain
- Rethink - make sure any identified actions are followed through. Ensure there is a culture of care with personalised support.
- Reflect - review systems and culture to determine the value added and identify areas for further growth and development.

From a student perspective the following actions were being trialled to promote wellbeing;

- Surveys
- Mindfulness programmes
- Role playing
- A focus on bystander awareness
- Prize draws
- Celebrating differences
- A focus on school values such as empathy and respect
- Open channels of communication between home and school

Student feedback showed a pattern of students being happier in collaborative spaces because they had more friends to choose from, and they liked that there was more than one adult available to them.

## **11. Leadership**

Clearly effective leadership is important when bringing in any new initiative. Some of the strategies used by successful schools when implementing innovative learning pedagogy were;

- Sow seeds and slowly introduce
- Give people some freedom to make mistakes and try new things
- Don't micro-manage staff
- Don't water the weeds. Spend your time and money on those teachers who were truly "inquisitive teachers".
- Effective professional development. Calling in the experts and allow teachers the time to visit and view successful practitioners.
- Educate whanau
- Developing leadership. One school looked closely at Patrick Lencioni's work with their management team around the five dysfunctions of leadership which enabled them to improve the effectiveness of their management team. Showing you are vulnerable as a leader and being open to feedback is a huge part of what makes a leader great in the eyes of their colleagues.

### [5 dysfunctions of leadership](#)

1. Absence of trust, including vulnerability based trust,
2. Fear of conflict
3. Lack of commitment
4. Peer to peer accountability
5. Inattention to results

Lencioni talks about the value of teamwork. His research points out the huge benefits of employing staff who are hungry, humble and smart. His work also shows that when an employee doesn't work out, it is always due to one of these three virtues being lacking in their make-up.

- Humble = does not think less of self; thinks of self less

- Hungry = aggressively pursues goals
- Smart = emotionally smart, that is, in interactions with others

O'Reilly 2016, states, "Leadership plays a critical role in the transition to and creation of effective teaching and learning environments in a FLS (Flexible Learning Spaces). Teachers identified the critical role leaders play in establishing vision, challenging beliefs, supporting staff and ensuring a school wide collective approach to change and innovation.

Teachers commented on the importance of leaders, 'holding the vision,' for the school and driving the change process through professional development and enabling resources and facilities". It all comes back to the work of Simon Sinek and his Golden Circle referenced earlier. Everything must fit with the vision at the centre of the circle. If it does not, then it is not worth spending time on.

## 12. Evidence of Success

According to Mark Osborne, there is a "growing body of hard, concrete evidence connecting learning environments with increased student achievement. In particular, two crucial studies have been published in recent times. One of these studies is from the University of Salford entitled 'Clever Classrooms' that found that "differences in the physical characteristics of classrooms explain 16 percent of the variation in learning progress over a year".

This work is also supported by NZCER's First National Picture (pg. 39), where it was shown there was a slight linear trend for teachers who team taught reporting that they carried out practices very well compared to those who did not team teach.

- **flexible groupings to meet the changing needs of individual students**  
(48% of those who team-taught all the time said they did this very well, decreasing to 27% of those who did not)
- **taking responsibility for the wellbeing of all the students taught**  
(45% of those who team-taught all the time said they did this very well, decreasing to 29% of those who did not)
- **providing students with opportunities to use different approaches to demonstrate their learning**  
(41% of those who team-taught all the time said they did this very well, decreasing to 29% of those who did not)
- **using parents' and whānau knowledge of their child to support the child's learning**  
(27% of those who team-taught all the time said they did this very well, decreasing to 19% of those who did not)
- **collaborating with parents and whānau to use their expertise to support class or school learning**  
(27% of those who team-taught all the time said they did this very well, decreasing to 16% of those who did not)
- **believing in their ability to improve learning outcomes for all students they taught**  
(55% of those who team-taught all the time said they did this very well, decreasing to 43% of those who did not).

Students learning in a team teaching environment gain the benefit of multiple perspectives on the curriculum and the opportunity to observe the dynamics of a range of teachers (Buckley, 2000). This is an argument put forward by schools as to

one of the major benefits of innovative learning practice, both from a students and a teacher's perspective. A number of teachers I spoke with suggested teaching in this way was the best professional development they had had as they were learning from their colleagues constantly.

Schools could not all categorically say the learning in the core areas had increased as a result of ILP, although they had a hunch it had. There were other factors that came into play such as the quality of the teachers working in these spaces. They could not say it was strictly the environment that was responsible for the increase. However, they could affirm, based on student feedback, the softer skills (key competencies) had been enhanced. They considered more time was able to be offered to priority learners due to the flexibility of the personnel.

One school was implementing some innovative practice around maths and had seen some pleasing results. The maths programme was made up of four days academic teaching and one day problem solving with students in groups of three with the pod teachers acting as coaches. These groups comprised of one high achiever, one middle achiever and one low achiever. The problems started off easy and branched out from there with the learners supporting and challenging each other's thinking along the way. There are considerable academic improvement for the middle learners in particular and increased engagement with the lower learners. What is known is that quality teaching leads to quality learning outcomes and in many cases the quality teachers had opted into working in these spaces.

One school showed ERO that data had improved in the core learning areas and that this was due directly to collaborative teaching. They felt the students now had more time for learning and teachers felt their own practice had accelerated due to observing colleagues on a daily basis. The student voice was considerably more positive due to increased student choice and control over their learning. This feedback was consistent with all the schools I visited.

Another school with a high population of maori students, felt the the innovative learning environment, with its broader understanding of success, is more like a marae and better suits the learning of Maori students. They had received excellent feedback from both the students and their whanau in this regard.

Neil O'Reilly (2016) from his extensive thesis work supports this by stating that, "co-teaching in a FLS can make a significant positive difference for all learners and improve the quality of teaching, teacher efficacy and well-being".

Self regulated learners and personalised learning are at the heart of a student centred learning environment, whether that be a single cell classroom space or a share teaching space. "Research shows that teacher controlled environments limit student self-regulation and force students to be reliant on the teacher and teacher control of the learning environment". (Absolum 2006).

### **Conclusion and Implications for Havelock North Primary School**

This sabbatical gave me a timely opportunity to engage with many inspiring professionals who had been through the "grind" of implementing innovative learning pedagogy and creating flexible spaces. I say grind, because this shift in practice is considerable. Convincing the parent body that ILP was the correct path to take was extremely challenging for many and in some cases it still presents an ongoing battle. This issue was more prevalent in higher decile schools and was not helped by the negative press in the media.

Some of the most voiced complaints publicly are centred around ILE spaces being noisy and having a lack of structure. Once again it all comes back to the quality of the teacher(s). A single cell could quite easily be chaotic too. Run well, ILE spaces are more structured than a traditional classroom space for obvious reasons. "Little Johnny" can still have his own desk just like before if this is how he learns best. From a noise perspective, these new spaces offer breakouts encompassing both quiet and collaborative zones. Therefore the assumption that noise is a factor is misinformed. However with the wrong personnel operating these spaces I am not denying it could certainly be a circus. It all comes down to quality teaching. Great teaching is great teaching, whether in a single cell or a flexible shared space. Explicit teaching is at the core of what a great teacher does.

The pedagogy associated with these innovative learning environments can and should be practised in single cell classrooms too, allowing students to have a far great level of agency.

The ILE approach had some obvious benefits for our priority learners. These centred around more teaching time, a more personalised approach and higher levels of engagement.

Derek Wenmouth states the following, "does an MLE suit all learners?" When the equally valid, yet often uncontested question is, "does a traditional egg-crate classroom suit the needs of all learners?" I think it is about looking at the child first and then deciding on the best environment for them.

Several of the schools were offering flexible options and some had been full circle in their thinking and were now considering some single cell alternatives for next year. Some schools left the choice to the teachers, but found it was rare for teachers to want to go back to the single cell approach. These teachers could see the professional benefits and enjoyed the support and the collegiality. A large number of schools felt the organic approach was the purest and most effective way to introduce ILEs and engage staff in the associated professional learning. As Osborne stated, "it was not being done to them". Through inquiry they had figured it out for themselves; that working in a collaboration potentially has benefits for all stakeholders.

It is common knowledge that it is often not the difference between schools that is the issue, it is the difference within schools. As alluded to earlier, this variation can be reduced by de-privatisation of practice, encouraging shared problem solving, having robust discussions around the evidence of student learning and engaging with research-informed approaches. While these are approaches we have adopted at HNPS, we still have some way to go to embed them into regular practice across the school.

I do like the idea of developing a "wellbeing" committee. Staff satisfaction and health is vital to the overall success of our school and directly impacts the quality of learning our students receive. I think our Board would be particularly interested in this work.

I would like to explore our current leadership model and look for ways to make this more effective. Lencioni's work could be a good place to start.

With any new initiative, schools leaders and boards of trustees have a responsibility to place learners at the centre of the decision making. As a larger primary school we are in a position to be able to offer flexibility. For some children having their own classroom with one teacher is their safety net. Nathan Mikaere-Wallis talks about the need for the dyadic relationship. Naturally the perception is that this would be

stronger where there is one teacher working with one class. The student would get to know that teacher much better right? However, it can be argued that there is more chance of a student forming a strong dyadic relationship when he or she has more than one significant adult in the teaching programme. Where there is a poor student-teacher connection in a single cell classroom, that could well transform into a difficult year for all stakeholders.

Moving forward at HNPS we will continue to embrace ILE's and refine our practice in this area. Exciting times lay ahead for us with two significant ILE upgrades on the horizon. It is critical our teachers to have a strong grasp of the cultural competencies in order to strengthen relationships. These competencies are about knowing, respecting, and working with Maori learners.

Successful collaboration is vital to the success of any school. Sir Ken Robinson (2010) is of the belief that most great learning happens in groups and that, "collaboration is the stuff of growth". It is about creating a culture where collaborating is a way of being and is a natural habit for students and teachers alike.

At HNPS we need to continue to strengthen student voice and ensure this work influences teacher practice. Teachers need to be comfortable to have their practice scrutinised and be open to feedback from both students and colleagues. We know the world is a rapidly changing place and we need to empower our learners with the tools to be ready for this change. Effective leadership coupled with a strong vision is at the the heart of this.

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