

Karen Brinsden

Principal Sabbatical Report

Term 3 2019

Acknowledgements

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- Counties Manukau Secondary Schools Principals Association

Purpose

Future focused education will involve a greater understanding of learning and the focus of my inquiry was centred on acquiring further strategies to become a more effective pedagogical leader of processes that enable students to maximize their outcomes.

The main components of my sabbatical was to spend time with the Visible Learning Community in Melbourne and New Zealand; attend the Annual Visible Learning Conference (Las Vegas) to engage further with John Hattie's work, and James Nottingham with his work on 'Challenging Learning'. When submitting my application for sabbatical the intention was to also visit Microsoft facilitators (Seattle) however an opportunity arose at the end of last year (2018) to visit Microsoft Head Office in Seattle ahead of my sabbatical. Interactions with the educators and communities provided the opportunity to review my leadership, our curriculum and pedagogical processes and resources to challenge our thinking as we review our junior curriculum and the potential changes to Level 1 NCEA.

The multifaceted inquiry looked at understanding the leadership qualities and skills that could enable me to lead more effectively at all levels within my school (Board, SLT, Heads of Learning, Whanau Leaders, staff and students), and investigate the dimensions that help guide innovative school reform based on the Microsoft Partners in Learning school model. There were four interconnected themes:

- *Where/ When Students Learn*
 - for example: physical and virtual environments; formal and informal environments; and innovative uses of ICT
- *What / How Students Learn*
 - for example: knowledge, skills / competencies; curriculum and assessment; physical and virtual environments; and authentic student agency
- *How Teachers Learn / Teach*
 - for example: professional practice and standards; coaching and mentoring; professional learning; and innovative uses of ICT
- *Develop and sustain school improvements*
 - for example: culture of innovation; leadership development and with our Community of Learning

My inquiry focus and new learnings will also contribute to the work of our Waipaparoa Community of Learning (CoL). Specifically, the achievement challenge to increase learner agency, how we see learner agency and why it matters. Crowhurst (2018) believes that 'to have agency is to possess the ability to exercise influence over one's circumstance'.

The following is an extract on how the Principal's Lead Group of our Waipaparoa Community defined and increased learner agency for our Kahui Ako and Learning Achievement Plan (2018-2020).

"Learner agency means that students are able to take charge of their learning in ways that increase their motivation and continually improve their knowledge and skills. It's the capacity to set useful goals and next learning steps based on learning needs, plan and organise well, self-monitor, and evaluate how well goals have been met. Strong learner agency is fundamental to students being successful lifelong learners, well equipped with useful strategies for their learning. Students who are scaffolded to take charge of their learning can achieve more in their learning and lives.

Learners need to have the skills and appropriate opportunities to express their agency. We can increase learner agency through deliberate teaching of metacognitive skills and self-regulation such as thinking aloud, self-questioning, help-seeking, dealing with distractors, setting appropriate goals, tracking progress towards them, appropriately adjusting learning strategies and accurately assessing outcomes develops learner agency. Scaffolding learner agency supports students' engagement in learning, and deepens their internal motivation to learn and improve, and their resilience in learning. It is supported by trustful and respectful relationships. Feedback from students is used

by teachers to improve their work with students, modelling learner agency themselves. Opportunities are given that enable students to grow and experience agency and its uses and rewards, through enabling them to contribute to the wellbeing of the school and its community” (pp 6-7).

Through our discussions at this leadership forum, we also identified the importance of learner agency:

- Students feel more strongly motivated through goal setting to which they are emotionally attached.
- Increases student engagement and motivation, impacting on academic achievement, behaviour and performance
- Gives students a voice
- It sustains higher levels of achievement
- It promotes self-awareness and self-efficacy
- Sets up students for success in the future
- It gives students relevance and ownership over their learning
- Allows for autonomy in learning
- Helps them to problem solve
- Places the locus of control with the student
- It allows learners to have greater control and success in areas of personal interest
- Facilitates a self-driven upward spiral of success
- Research has proven that when students are active and agentic learners their engagement, thinking and academic outcomes improve.
- Brings about a greater sense of belonging
- Brings about an emotional connection to learning
- Provides relevance and purpose to their learning
- Creates confident, committed (connected), reflective lifelong learners
- Equips students with the competencies, skills and dispositions for participating meaningfully as a citizen in a global society

Summary of activities

The chosen professional learning activities were designed to challenge my thinking with the current review of our junior curriculum and the potential changes to Level 1 NCEA. The specific activities involved:

- Professional readings relating to Hattie’s latest research and readings relating to leadership, teacher clarity and student engagement. Peter DeWitt, Jenni Donohoo and James Nottingham. Some of the books I found most relevant and of interest are listed at the end of this report.
- Discussion on the history and development of Visible Learning within New Zealand with Shaun Hawthorne of Cognition, Auckland
- Attendance at two international conferences: Annual Visible Learning Conference, Las Vegas; and Corwin Professional Learning Conference - Data with Evidence, Melbourne Australia

- Melbourne School visits: Kolbe Catholic College, Geelong Grammar School, Saint Bernard's Primary
- Auckland School visits: and Stonefield's Primary School and Selwyn College

Findings

This opportunity has provided me with the space and time to instigate much thought which I look forward to sharing with my school colleagues and other interested parties. Here are some of my observations, thoughts and general findings

- The principles of Hattie's Visible Learning support the development of learner agency.
- Hattie's ground-breaking work in (2009) was his meta-analysis seminal research and the formulation of an 'effect size' for various influences. He found that the average effect size of all interventions he studied was 0.4. This he called the 'hinge point'. An influence or behaviour that has an effect size of 0.4 equates to a year's worth of growth for a year in school for a student. His research identifies the following as the top seven influencing behaviours:
 1. Teachers and students, as evaluators of their impact (0.90)
 2. All having high expectations (0.90)
 3. All moving towards explicit success criteria (0.77)
 4. Using the goldilocks principles of challenge (0.74)
 5. Errors and trust are *welcomed* as opportunities to learn (0.72)
 6. Maximise feedback to teachers about their impact (0.72)
 7. A focus on learning: right proportions of surface/ deep (0.70)
- According to John Hattie (2009) Visible Learning and Teaching occurs when teachers see learning through the eyes of students and help them become their own teachers. This is a desired outcome at Botany Downs Secondary College.
- School based professional learning programmes require a strong focus on providing high quality effective teaching informed by current research / best practice.
- Engaging in a 'Visible Learning Plus' professional development programme for a minimum of three years, is a significant financial investment however, this enables a cohesive school-wide approach including a consistent language of learning to be well embedded. Example in practice: Kolbe Catholic College, Melbourne.
- There is no one most effective way proposed by researchers to implement the principles of Visible Learning to maximise student achievement and learner agency.
- Hattie and Timperley state that the purpose of feedback is to "reduce the gap between where the student is and where he or she is meant to be". Some useful questions to ask/answer by the teacher and/or student are:
 - Where am I going? - *What are the goals?*
 - How am I going? - *What progress is being made toward the goal? and*
 - Where to next? - *What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?*

One of the most important influences on student achievement is *how* a teacher thinks about learning and their own role. Hattie and Zierer (2018) define ten behaviours or mind frames that teachers need to adopt in order to maximise student success. These include:

- Thinking of and evaluating your own impact on students' learning
- Considering the importance of assessment and feedback for teachers
- Working collaboratively and the sense of community
- Incorporating the notion that learning needs to be challenging
- Engaging in dialogue and the correct balance between talking and listening
- Conveying the success criteria to learners
- Building positive relationships

The themes that emerged from my study that I wish to delve further into, and which could form a framework for future staff professional learning to develop and embed learner agency include:

- Co-constructed success criteria and learning intentions between teacher and students
- Student engagement
- Teacher clarity
- Learner and teachers' feedback
- Student, teacher and collective efficacy
- Teacher mindframes

Concluding Remarks

As an experienced principal I am aware that new challenges and new learnings are strategies that contribute to keeping me effective in my role. My goal was to increase my knowledge to lead and improve the school's ongoing development of curriculum, pedagogy, culture of learning and assessment in a future focused innovative community.

Undertaking this journey and engaging with the opportunities it has afforded me, has challenged my thinking about what effective learning looks like, what is 'learner agency' and how our teachers can best be supported to teach our students to be agentic learners. These new learnings and knowledge will not only inform the development of our PLD programme for 2020 but support one of the key achievement challenges of our Kahui Ako, the development of learner agency.

Readings

DeWitt, P. (2017). *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most*. Corwin, Thousand Oaks.

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Waipaparoa Community of Learning Achievement Plan (2018-2020)

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