Transforming Practice

Reflections from visits to schools in NW Arkansas
4-17 November, 2019

Derek Wenmoth,

November 2019

futuremakers

Contents

Background

Schools in NW Arkansas have been engaged in an educational transformation project over the past three years under the guidance and direction of the Office of Innovation within the University of Arkansas, and generously supported with funding from the Walton Family Foundation.

In October 2017 a group of educators from NW Arkansas travelled to New Zealand as part of a Walton Family Foundation funded project to look at examples of educational transformation in schools there. The International Learning Journey consisted of developing on-line community through web-based informational meetings and while in New Zealand school tours and collaborative meetings with educators implementing innovative systems and strategies. These learning experiences were organised by CORE Education, and Derek Wenmoth acted as host and facilitator through the week.

Since that visit a range of innovative approaches and experiences have been implemented in local schools, and a community of practice established to promote and propagate these experiences more widely. An annual conference has provided the context for celebrating these achievements and sharing the lessons learned so that a more widespread adoption of the things that work may be achieved. As such, the groundwork for transformation has been established, building on a culture of collaborative inquiry and shared practice.

In November, 2019, Derek Wenmoth returned to NW Arkansas at the invitation of the Office of Innovation to visit the schools involved in the innovation project. This report provides a summary of his observations and recommendations for the continued work in this area.

Thanks

Special thanks to the Walton Family Foundation for the financial support to make this project possible, to the staff of the Office of Innovation for inviting me to visit and looking after me while I was in NW Arkansas, and for all of their work in arranging the schedule of visits – and to the principals, staff and students of all of the schools we visited, for your warm welcomes, generous hospitality and openness in sharing all of the amazing things you are doing in your schools.

Introduction

He iti te mokoroa nāna te kahikatea i kakati

Even the small can make a big impact on the big

Key observations from the NZ visit:

During the time spent in New Zealand the NW Arkansas educators spent a lot of time processing and synthesising the things they had seen and and heard during their visits to a range of school contexts.

They visited a number of schools in Auckland where they observed classrooms and teachers who are breaking the ground on personalised pedagogy. They saw purpose built Modern Learning Environments (MLEs) used in creative and innovative ways, as well as modern learning pedagogies being used in traditional school settings, including schools that have been opened up to promote collaborative activity by removing traditional classroom walls.

The group witnessed students discovering their passions via initiatives such as Project Based Learning (PBL) and 'Passion Projects'. They saw a variety of timetable structures being used, and several effective models of inquiry based learning and eLearning initiatives that enable learning to be more flexible, personalised and ubiquitous. Teachers they observed spoke strongly and passionately about wanting to provide environments for their students that required them to become critical thinkers, innovators, creative, and self-organised.

From those conversations a number of key themes emerged which they identified as being the things they might focus on in their own school contexts on their return to Arkansas. These included:

1. Culturally responsive practice

"*Cultural responsiveness is much more than introducing myths or metaphors into class. It means interacting with families to truly understand their reality; it means understanding the socio political history and how it impacts on classroom life; it means challenging personal beliefs and actions; and, it means changing practices to engage all students in their learning and make the classroom a positive learning place for all students*". R.Bishop, M.Berryman, T.Cavanagh and L.Teddy, (March 2007)

The recognition of NZ as a bi-cultural nation involving partnership with Māori, together with the large populations of Pacific Islands people and an ever increasing population of people from other parts of the world means that NZ classrooms are places where the people from diverse cultural backgrounds are welcomed and accommodated. Understanding how teacher practice and school culture needs to change to ensure that this is a positive experience for all is something that NZ educators are working hard to achieve. During their visit, the Arkansas educators were greeted in culturally appropriate ways, and spent time learning more about the ways in which deepening understandings of cultural traditions and 'ways of being' can lead to more effective and powerful learning experiences for all in the classroom.

2. Learner agency

A great deal of attention has been given to the development of learner agency in New Zealand Schools. Learner agency is defined by the OECD as "the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act

responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others."

In schools and systems that encourage student agency, learning involves not only instruction and evaluation but also co-construction. Thus, collaboration is an important dimension of agency, teachers and students become co-creators in the teaching-and-learning process.

Student-led, and self-directed learning approaches were widely observed in the NZ context. These are examples of approaches that have evolved through the emphasis on learner agency.

The three dimensions of agency (from Wenmoth) referred to in the video:
- Self - involves the initiative or self-regulation of the learner
- Others - is interdependent. It mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context of the classroom.
- Environment - includes an awareness of the responsibility of one's own actions on the environment shared with others.

Examples of approaches and strategies observed in the New Zealand context that were examples of this happening included the co-construction of learning intentions, peer tutoring and support, student-led conferencing and the use of the 'learning pit' (from the work of James Nottingham[1]) as a strategy for empowering students to deal with difficult and challenging situations in their learning journey. Other examples included the use of student-led project-based learning and 'passion projects' in a number of schools.

3. Localised curriculum

New Zealand's national curriculum framework[2] was formally introduced in 2007, and is designed around a vision, a set of principles and five key competencies. More complex than skills, the competencies draw also on knowledge, attitudes, and values in ways that lead to action. They are not separate or stand-alone. They are the key to learning in every learning area.

Schools are responsible for designing their own, localised curriculum[3] within the guidance of this framework, ensuring that it is responsive to the needs, identity, language, culture, interests, strengths and aspirations of their learners and their families and have a clear focus on what supports the progress of all learners.

The Arkansas group observed this in each school they visited, where the learning activities were designed in this way and where the local community and resources were being utilised to support this.

4. Evidence-based assessment approaches

The framework for assessment and evaluation in New Zealand schools[4] is described in terms of the information needed at three different levels: student, school and system. Key principles that underpin the current development of assessment policy at all levels of the system include:

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[1] https://www.jamesnottingham.co.uk/learning-pit/

[2] http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum

[3] https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Reviewing-your-curriculum/Leading-Local-Curriculum-Guide-series

[4] https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/oecd-review-on-evaluation-and-assessment-frameworks-for-improving-school-outcomes/chapter-6-student-assessment

- the student is at the centre of assessment practice;
- the curriculum underpins assessment;
- assessment capability is crucial to improvement;
- an assessment capable system is an accountable system;
- multiple sources of evidence enable a more accurate response;
- effective assessment is reliant on quality interactions and relationships.

A common theme in all schools is the emphasis on assessment *for* learning[5] (as distinct to it being a summative practice only), and assessment *as* learning[6] with the emphasis on students monitoring their own learning and providing evidence of that learning throughout the learning process Thus, assessment is seen to be an integral part of the teaching and learning process, not something that is left to the end. It is used to inform next steps in learning, and is transparent to all involved – including the learner and his/her parents.

The Arkansas teachers observed a range of practices being used in schools that exemplified this approach, including student-led conferences, use of student-owned portfolios, use of rubrics used by teachers and students to make an assessment of progress, and various forms of ongoing reporting to parents of this progress.

5. Collaborative teaching teams

Teachers working collaboratively was a feature of most of the schools visited. This is becoming increasingly the 'norm' in NZ schools, particularly with the introduction of more open, modern learning environments (MLEs) in which there may be 3 teachers working with groups of up to 80 students for example. The benefits of this approach include the ability to share tasks according to the personality and expertise of each team member, building a greater sense of trust and accountability, and allowing teachers to feel confident about contributing their most dynamic skills toward school improvement. The collaborative approaches observed by the Arkansas visitors went beyond simply meeting to plan collaboratively or have students move between rooms to learn from 'subject specialists'. It involved groups of teachers interacting as a team with groups of students in a single space, with teachers taking different roles as facilitators, coaches, learning support specialists etc.

6. Role of digital technologies

Digital technologies were observed being used in a range of ways and in a range of contexts. NZ schools are responsible for providing for devices for learners out of their operations grants, and this is seldom sufficient to enable the level of provision some see as necessary. As a result, schools have explored a variety of ways to provide students with access to the technology that supports their learning activity, from 'pods' of laptops in classes that are shared around groups, through to BYOD (bring your own device) approaches where students are encouraged to bring their personally owned device to school. This approach has been widely adopted in NZ schools, not only because of the potential savings for schools, but more importantly, because of the research findings that demonstrate the extra benefits provided where students have 'ownership' of their device and it becomes something they use where-ever they are learning – at home, at school etc.

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[5] https://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-for-learning/Assessment-for-learning-in-practice

[6] http://etec.ctlt.ubc.ca/510wiki/Assessment_as_Learning

Part One: School Visit Feedback

Ma tini ma mano ka rapa te whai.

By many, by thousands, the work (project) will be accomplished.

The summaries on the following pages are of observations made during the visits to each of the schools during the period 4-17 November. These summaries are a simple record of reflections and suggestions, and not a formal evaluation of what is happening in each school – that would involve a much longer and more in-depth period of time. Instead, the summaries provide a 'snapshot' of what was seen and discussed, with a particular emphasis on capturing some of the things that have been deliberately incorporated from what was learned during the New Zealand visit (see previous section).

The aim of these visits – and the summaries provided – is to provide something of an 'external observer' view of what has been achieved, and provide some thoughts about the next steps that might be taken in each school to further develop the areas being worked on.

Visit Schedule summary:

Mon. 4 Nov	Tues. 5 Nov	Wed. 6 Nov	Thurs. 7 Nov	Fri. 8 Nov
Thaden School, Bentonville	Holt Elementary, Fayetteville	Happy Hollow Elementary, Fayetteville	George Elementary, Sprindale	Tyson Elementary, Springdale
Mon. 11 Nov	Tues. 12 Nov	Wed. 13 Nov	Thurs. 14 Nov	Fri. 15 Nov
Southside Elementary Siloam Springs	Northside Elementary, Rogers	Fairview Elementary, Rogers	Willowbrook Elementary, Bentonville	Ruth Barker Middle School, Bentonville
NOTE Haas Hall were also involved in the NZ tour, but were unable to find time in the two week period of this project to accommodate a visit.				

1. Thaden School, Bentonville

NZ trip members: Jennifer Marien (no longer at Thaden) and Mohammed Ramadan.

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Thaden's new school complex has been built since the visit to New Zealand took place. It is an impressive structure that incorporates a wide variety of specialist areas along with classroom spaces that cater for groups of up to 20 students.

With the resourcing available to them as an independent school including the fees paid by students, Thaden has managed to attract a talented staff with depth of expertise in each of their specialist areas. This is evident in the quality of instruction demonstrated in class lessons.

Impressive sense of 'family' during lunch together, and in the way students and staff relate to each other. Student's given voice to help shape how things happen at Thaden through a student council structure.

Some innovative approaches to assessment evident, with individual rubrics being used in each course providing students with the opportunity to provide evidence of achievement and use this in student-led conferences. (Thaden staff are working with the Mastery Transcript Consortium[7] on this.)

The school's signature programmes (meals, reels, wheels) provide students with excellent facilities and a high level of choice to expand skills in areas such as drama, hospitality, music, sport, cycle maintenance etc.

GROW: Next steps

The Thaden school programme is built strongly around a commitment to its mission and guiding principles. Priority is given to catering for the students as individuals and preparing them to succeed into the future through the provision of as wide a range of choices as possible, both in terms of the set curriculum and the extra-curricular activities.

Considerations for next steps include:

- Explore strategies for developing even further a school-wide approach to monitoring and assessing the trans-disciplinary goals (e.g. critical thinking) which is currently done within each discipline.

- Consider opportunities for team teaching where appropriate, so that there are explicit links made between discrete subject areas.

- Increase level of learner-driven activity within class lessons, catering for the personal interests and capabilities of students, learning at their own pace and style.

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[7] https://mastery.org/
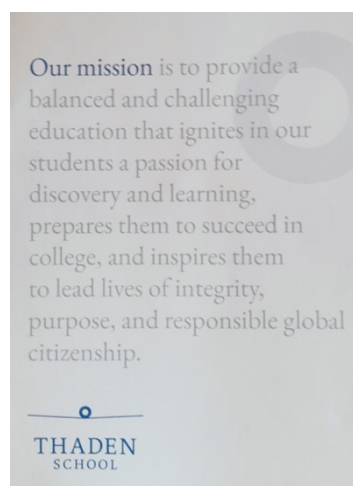
2. Holt Middle School, Fayetteville

NZ trip members: Matt Morningstar (principal) and Blaine Sanders

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Intentional emphasis on developing a strong school culture evident through this visit, valuing the student as an individual, capable of managing his/her own learning, and demonstrating responsiblity to others and to the school environment. Intentional and consistent reference to the learner qualities (adventurer, collaborator, self-manager, neighbour, thinker) throughout the school – including by students as they reflect on their learning and are able to articluate both what they are learning about and the process(es) they are using to get there.

Vision and mission of the Fayetteville Public Schools stands at the front door of the school – emphasising the commitment to personalisation and inclusion. Principal and teacher comments; "personalisation happens every day at Holt."

Staff and students organised into 'packs' based on grade level with learning spaces arranged in hubs around a shared withdrawal room (den) and larger common area (pack space), all provided with AV displays and sound. Evidence of these areas being used productively to support student choice about where and how they learn, together with providing purposeful spaces for group activity of different sizes. Students may earn a trust pass to enable them the freedom to make use of these spaces.

Holt student representation of the 'learning pit'.

Staff speak of the strengths of working collaboratively in 'packs' of three, sharing a common language and benefiting from the mix of strengths and abilities in the team. Some teams spoke of the barriers to being effective, including lack of planning time together, not knowing what the possibilities are or the strategies that may help them achieve this, the pressure to assess to standards set by state/district, and issues regarding behaviour among some students.

GROW: Next Steps

- There is a great deal of variance across the school in terms of adoption of innovative practices among staff. Need to promote more of a 'risk-taking' culture across all staff, promoting the school-wide adoption of learner-centric approaches , reflecting on them and embedding those that work. Need to create an environment where staff are regularly challenging themselves as learners in the same ways they expect of their students.

- Spend time unpacking the FPS vision and mission, and align to the V&M for Holt – use this to create a collaboratively owned 'why' across the whole Holt community.

- Consider greater emphasis given to inter-disciplinary approach to learning, less emphasis on separating out specific subjects. Work more on integrated themes and projects, at least for 'chunks' of the programme.

- Be intentional about sharing practice within the school and across the district. Some really great things happening in pockets – so promote and support these, and provide time/opportunity for the sharing to happen.

3. Happy Hollow Elementary, Fayetteville

NZ trip members: Dondi Frisinger (Principal), Maranda Seawood

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Permission given to each team of teachers across the school to exercise their agency in decisions about ways of working – and to take the whole school goals and interpret these in-depth in ways that are appropriate to the grade level they teach and the interests and skills of the teachers in the group.

Classrooms created as spaces to feel like 'home', with emphasis on creating an environment where students feel comfortable about taking risks (in small steps) and 'being themselves'.

Strong focus on the learner qualities used consistently across the school is key here – understood well by both teachers and learners.

Plenty of evidence of learners being able to work independently as well as in groups, with emphasis on developing the skills to learn collaboratively.

Interest in developing the use of 'data binders' more across the school as a means of creating more transparency around the assessment process (for the learner, between teachers and with parents). Some use being made of SeeSaw[8] as an electronic means of sharing information with teacher and parents.

Work beginning on working with students on goal setting – sometimes using pre-tests as a means of identifying gaps in learning which then become goals for the 'next steps'.

Strengths observed in focus on social and emotional learning (SEL), cross curricular and thematic approaches in some areas, use of 'the learning pit' to empower students to work through difficulties, adoption of STEM approaches, emphasis on inquiry-based approaches.

GROW: Next Steps

- Goal setting among students is a strength – but the real value is in developing a plan about how to achieve these. Need to work as a staff and with students on strategies for achieving this.

- Need to emphasise the strengths of co-teaching by thinking big and challenging some of the structures that have been there for some time.

- Consider how the open spaces (commons) that are shared by groups of classes might be designed more intentionally to become part of the 'flow' of learning, enabling learners to move in and out of their classrooms spaces more freely and engage in learning activity within the open space.

- Work collectively as a staff to address some of the shared concerns about lack of time to achieve the change they want, and about the stress they feel exists among students because of the testing regime that is 'imposed'. Ask; 'what is important for the learner'? How might you share more with the district what you are doing, look for allies to support your work.

- Consider changing the name of the 'data binders' to 'learner profile' – and work to change emphasis from creating a record of achievement (i.e. grades) to creating a record of learning – with a focus on assessment *for* learning, with links to evidence etc.

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[8] https://web.seesaw.me/

4. George Elementary, Springdale

NZ trip members: Annette Freeman (Principal) and Jessie Walls

GLOW: Observations and discussion

An extremely positive tone and evidence of a learning culture throughout the school – seen both in terms of the relationships and communication among staff and students, and in the representation of the approach to learning and the underpinning beliefs behind this in the form of charts and presentation of children's work. All strongly aligned with the school's core beliefs about student agency, trust, personalisation of learning, student choice and environment.[9]

Observed lots of examples of learners seeing themselves as learners – all learners given an opportunity to succeed, regardless of their designation re poverty index or language learning. Principal and staff have been intentional in developing strategies that are consistently applied across the school, providing coherence and familiarity for learners.

Students working collaboratively to programme a drone in a STEM class.

STEM work with drones an excellent example of student-led learning, with group problem solving at the heart of the challenge that was set.

Students have a 'home-book' diary in which they keep a record of work on their schedule for the day/week, which is taken home for parents to comment on. Great example of home-school partnership being enacted.

Staff assigned a 'specialist' designation (maths, literacy etc.) with students moving between classes in each grade level.

GROW: Next Steps

- Pursue desire to see more evidence student directed learning and student voice in all areas of the school. Work collectively to ensure no staff member feels threatened by what the district officials or parents response to this might be – work to ensure it all aligns positively with the core beliefs of the school.

- Consider how digital technologies might be used as tools for creation and presentation of ideas and information more frequently – aim for the higher end of the SAMR framework[10] in this.

- Explore ideas for incorporating more thematic planning within teams, where the students are able to demonstrate progress towards standards within the context of cross-curricular projects or themes, and not see these things taught in isolation.

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[9] https://www.sdale.org/o/george-elementary/page/our-culture--20

[10] https://www.schoology.com/blog/samr-model-practical-guide-edtech-integration

5. Tyson Elementary, Springdale

NZ trip members: Shelly Poage (Principal) and Leigh Johnson

GLOW: Observations and discussion

School is celebrating being in the top five in the State for the third year in a row, despite also having high levels of ESOL (50%) and poverty (75%)

Key lessons from NZ that have been applied include a strong emphasis on building a whole school learning culture, value of parent and community partnerships, introduction of passion projects, focus on learner qualities and strong emphasis on developing learner agency.
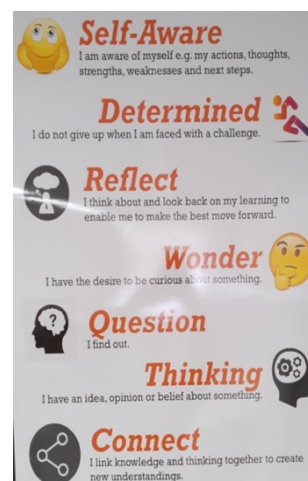

The adoption of the EAST inititive[11] is providing a valuable platform for these things to be developed in the school. The 'little libraries' project provides a superb example of student-led learning involving community parternship. The school's ELO (Extra Learning Opportunity) programme provides similar opportunites for the development of self-directed learners.

Evidence of a school-wide focus on the development of learning qualities can be found everywhere, and these are used to guide the planning and implementation of learning programmes by teachers, as well as providing a framework for personal reflection through the learning process by the learners themselves.

Tyson Elementary Learner qualities

The presence of an EY programme and an adult language learning class in the school provides an extra 'richness' to the culture of the school, and provides evidence of learning being something that is life-long and connected between home and school.

GROW: Next Steps

- Develop an intentional strategy to 'shift the ownership of learning' across all areas - make the development of learner agency and self-directed learning the primary pedagogical goal of the school into the future.
- Expand the scope of the ELO sessions based on the methodology of 'open-space conferencing'[12]
- Continue to explore how to make ELO and EAST become the way learning happens across the entire school.
- Use the learner qualities to develop a robust graduate profile that can then be used as the framework for creating learner-led and owned learning portfolios. (Rename the current data-binder to place the emphasis on it belonging to the learner, and focused on evidence of learning as distinct from the narrow focus on 'data')

Students conducting their own learning conference sessions at Tyson Elementrary School

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[11] https://www.eastinitiative.org/aboutcontact/Overview.aspx

[12] https://www.wintertechforum.com/open-spaces/

6. Southside Elementary, Siloam Springs

NZ trip members: Rebecca Evans and Tamara Lane[13]

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Key focus during this visit was on the strategic intent of staff to increase the level of personalisation and student agency across the school. Discussion centred around the interest they have in introducing data notebooks as a mechanism for students to track their own progress.
We discussed the key reasons they may want to do this:

- To make explicit the learning intentions and the criteria upon which assessments of learning would be made,
- To establish a process for making judgements and reflecting on the learning taking place,
- To create a place where evidence of learning may be collated and linked specifically to the criteria in the assessment rubrics,
- To provide a focus for reporting on progress, including continuous reporting to parents and student-led conferencing.

Discussed the notion of student agency, and the importance of helping students deeply understand themselves as learners. Introducing the notion of a graduate profile and learner qualities is important here – to introduce a common understanding of what is important across the school, and a shared language to communicate this. Connections here with the behavioural focus and their PAWS framework were discussed.

Staff are currently working in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that meet weekly for around 50 minutes which creates the opportunity for them to observe in each other's classrooms etc. We discussed the idea of creating an 'innovation' focus for these groups based on the introduction of the data notebooks, with a 'fail fast, fix fast' mindset – trying things out and assessing how they went on short cycles.

Around the school there was lots of evidence of meta-cognative strategies being introduced to students which provides an excellent foundation for the work ahead.

We discussed the steps that could be taken to scaffold both teachers and students through the process of understanding how to recognise evidence of learning.

Also reviewed the work on an electronic version of a data journal that has been developed, and explored how this might be further enhanced through the use of specifically designed rubrics.

GROW: Next Steps

- Consider changing the language from 'data notebook' to 'learning journal'.
- Collectively plan, implement and reflect on 'small steps' towards building the language of learning required to successfully use a learning journal
- Empower existing PLCs to do this work – consider shifts in composition of PLCs as the work evolves
- Take time to develop a school-wide understanding of learner qualities, develop a list for this school and then embed these into all aspects of the teaching and learning programmes.
- Focus on PD around the design and implementation of rubrics that address the skills, learning strategies and learner qualities

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[13] We acknowledge the death of Tamara Lane who was principal at the time she travelled with the group to NZ.

7. Northside Elementary, Rogers

NZ trip members: Anita Turner (Principal), Katie Schuett

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Key thing from the NZ visit that has been brought back to Northside is the use of 'lines of learning', enabling learners and teachers to understand the steps required to reach goals on the road to mastery. When this was initially considered, principal and staff soon realised they didn't have the infrastructure in place to allow this to work – so needed to spend time building up the patterns of expectation, behaviour and understanding to support it.
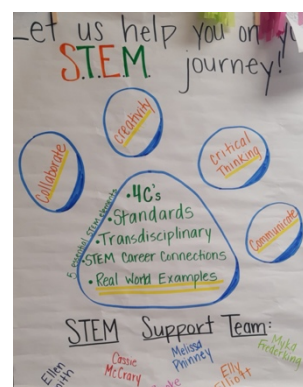
In the process of doing this staff became aware of the great degree of variance in their expectations, and the need to deepen understandings of what 'next steps' may be for indiviudal learners.

The new 'wit and wisdom' curriculum adopted by the district is helping with their endeavours by not treating skills in isolation and placing importance also on knowledge building.

The recent rennovations of the buildings will provide a chance to 're-orient' the pedagogial practices in the school. The adjacency of grade levels, together with the fact that teachers here teach across all of the curriculum provides a great starting point for a more collaborative and integrated approach to working with students.

Northside STEM framework

The Maker Space located in the library area has enormous potential and is led by a passionate educator. The school's work with STEM provides an excellent framework for re-thinking pedagogical priorities, and for developing strategies for assessing the development of these competencies among learners.

Principal and staff are committed and open to innovation – the school is very fortunate to be in a position to embrace change and adopt learner-centred approaches that build learner agency

GROW: Next Steps

- Genius hour and passion projects – how might these approaches be more widely adapted? What support/permission needs to be given to let this happen?
- Lines of learning and progressions – need to explore together how these are used effectively and avoid them actually inhibiting deep learning. Goal here – to ensure that all students see themselves as learners.
- Utilise the passion and learning of early adopters – share their experiences back across the whole staff
- Maker space – needs to become more integrated with the learning in classrooms, otherwise will be seen as simply a place to 'play'. Act to see a greater connection between STEM and classroom learning
- Mission statement – explore as a whole staff 'what does an environment of excellence look like?' Link this explicitly with what is happening in every area of the school
- Trust cards – design a new approach that will ensure students have the freedom to move around within the new building
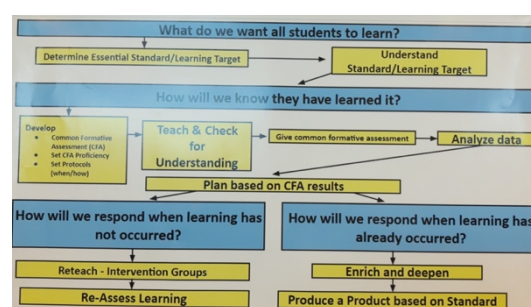
8. Fairview Elementary, Rogers

NZ trip members: Laura Quillen (Principal), Katie Schuett and Becca Braun (from Reagan Elementary)

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Inspiring to see the work achieved by an enthusiastic group of staff in this brand new school over just three months. The decision to focus on building a sense of 'family' across all of their activity is excellent, as it has created the opportunity for building a very intentional school culture – evidence of this can be seen across all areas of the school.

Many ideas from the NZ visit, together with lessons from other visits and professional development have been used to inform the approach to teaching and learning in the school, including:

- Teachers have been given responsibility for teaching across all areas of the curriculum and working in grade level teams where the care of learners in that grade is a shared responsibility.

- Emphasis on PLCs as a strategy for engaging in cycles of planning and reflection re innovations in approach and the establishment of shared practice.

- Use of 'trust badges' as a strategy for promoting independence and learner agency

- Emphasis on using lines of learning/progressions as a way of making learning visible and helping learners see themselves as learners in this process

PLC process – Fairview Elementary

- Introduction of a 'genius hour' and 'passion projects' to provide space for student-led, project based learning

Discussed the significant challenge for teachers (and principal) in meeting the demands and requirements of the State and District re an overly prescriptive curriculum assessment of standards as a measure of achievement, balanced against the desire to create a more holistic, learner-centric environment for learning, where there is genuine agency and a context for deep and immersive learning that results in high levels of achievement in the academic areas alongside the development of personal qualities/capabilities of the student as a learner.

GROW: Next Steps

1. The school leadership and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to creating a vibrant, student-centred and learner-led culture in the school. Strongly encourage this group to mantain a focus on their 'why' (as seen in the unpacking of the Rogers district mission statement) so that this underpins all decision making and learning design.

Rogers Public Schools Mission:
To provide an environment of educational excellence where all belong, all learn, all succeed.

2. Explore further how, collectively, the staff can create space for and be given permission to experiment with and trial approaches that are aligned with the mission (why).

3. Explore the use of the SOLO taxonomy[14] as a means of providing an underpinning framework for the development of progression statements for learners, that can be used across all areas of the curriculum and of the school.

4. Further develop the concept of the Trust badge as a means of promoting learner agency.

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[14] https://www.johnbiggs.com.au/academic/solo-taxonomy/

9. Willowbrook Elementary, Bentonville

NZ trip members: Cindy Dewey (Principal), Landi Tarp (teacher) and Tamara Gibson (District)

GLOW: Observations and discussion

Large school with plenty going on! This is a school where the emphasis on culture is palpable from the first entry – passionate principal and equally passionate staff ☺

School-wide emphasis on increasing student engagement has been a major focus since the NZ tour. Belief that this leads to empowerment of learners and rigor in learning process.

Students divided into houses, vertical groupings, with students staying in the same house for their life at the school. Staff also assigned to a house. House names in languages of the different cultures represented in the school. Time each week for house meetings used to emphasise the learning dispositions – were largely relational but becoming more purposeful and structured.

Classrooms observed provided insights into creative, learner-centred approaches at all levels of the school. Emphasis on engagement – with purposeful academic activity as the focus.

Very creative integrated/thematic approach in art class – provides a model that could be usefully appropriated in other areas of the school to provide a greater degree of learner-led activity.

Overall – a school with a motivated staff on a learning journey together!!!

GROW: Next Steps

- Consider obtaining some picnic tables to provide seating and group-work settings in the outdoor space/courtyard – intentionally creating a link between the indoors and outdoors as learning spaces.

- Consider purchasing remotes for some laptops to make for more streamlined use of PPT presentations in class – huge benefit for learners also as they present their work.

- Take time as a staff and then with students to de-construct the dispositions, asking "what will they look like, feel like, sound like?" at various times – use this deconstruction as the start-point for actively 'noticing' when they are being exhibited.

- Consider staff visits as a key strategy for sharing best practice – start with visits to other classes within the building, then to other buildings, and then (virtually) to classes in other places (including NZ?) This will help build the skills of teachers to recognise powerful learning activity in other contexts and then reflect on and appreciate it in their own.

- Professional Reading suggestions:
  - Stratosphere, by Michael Fullan - https://michaelfullan.ca/books/stratosphere/
  - Coherence, by Joanne Quinn and Michael Fullan - https://michaelfullan.ca/books/coherence-right-drivers-action-schools-districts-systems/
  - A Rich Seam – Fullan and Langworthy - https://michaelfullan.ca/a-rich-seam-how-new-pedagogies-find-deep-learning/

10.   Ruth Barker Middle School, Bentonville

NZ trip members: Eric Hipp (Principal), Kimber Jungles

Observations and discussion
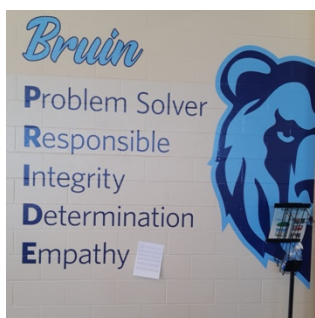
A vibrant school atmosphere with strong leadership and passionate staff. The display of the school's learner qualities (PRIDE) in the main hall provide clear evidence of what guides the focus of learning in the school – and understanding the process of consultation that led to the development of these emphasised the significance of these to this school community.

Key focus for the school since the NZ trip has been to focus on developing a learner-centred approach across all areas, with the learner dispositions being a key part of this. The school has also worked collaboratively to develop a set of shared beliefs that underpin everything they do. These identify the things that the staff and community believe are important for the school to be doing and how they do this – and are inclusive of the academic and social needs of learners, as well as providing a 'moral purpose' for those working with them in the school.

The multicultural mix of students is a special characteristic of the school – and staff are focusing on embracing culturally responsive practices as a part of their commitment to a personalised approach to learning. This was also reflected in the discussions with students who had lots of questions about how different cultures are made to feel included in the NZ system, with reference also made to racist attitudes being an issue at times.

Evidence of lots of collaborative planning and teaching among the staff in the school – reflected in the interesting and creative set-up of learning spaces of some teams. This reflects the ways in which staff are working to translate the school's beliefs into their daily work. Also reflects the principal's belief that "teaching is a team sport" (an idea also gleaned from the NZ trip).

Next Steps

- Building on the excellent work in developing the learner dispositions should be a priority. Exploring ways of ensuring they are intentionally used within the curriculum should be the focus. A useful start point is to work with both staff and students to expore what each might look like, sound like and feel like in the every day context of school – then use the synthesised list of feedback as a reference point when planning, to ensure there is an explicit focus at assessment time to check if these characteristics have been observed. Another suggestion is to consider developing a set of observable indicators for each grade level that staff might use at the end of the year to review how well each has been addressed, to what extent, and whether there are any gaps.

- Continue to explore the notion of culturally responsive practice across all staff and with the community. Be intentional about addressing some of the issues identified, and seek to build a fully inclusive culture that values and recognises the culture and identity of each learner.

- Explore ways in which the creative use of learning spaces already evident may be expanded further to find ways of making these 'shared' spaces, with staff and students able to move more feely between them to find the learning context that is most appropriate to their learning need at the time.

Part Two: Summary Comments

Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi.

As an old net withers another is remade.

The observations reported on in this document are merely a 'snapshot' of what was seen and discussed during the visits to each school. They cannot and do not represent a deeply researched analysis of what is happening at a school or district level. They do, however, provide a context for further professional dialogue and relection, which was the intention of this series of visits and the production of this report. Thus, the comments below are offered, not as a judgement but as a starting point for such discussions that may lead to the continuing transformation of the practices in each school and across the districts they are a part of.

Importance of the 'why'

The importance of starting with a fundamental understanding and sharing of the beliefs of staff and the community they serve cannot be stressed enough, and this provides the foundation, the 'why' for all further developmental efforts in each school (see diagram below for relationship between the central 'why' and the practices that are built out from that – the lived expression of the school's values.)
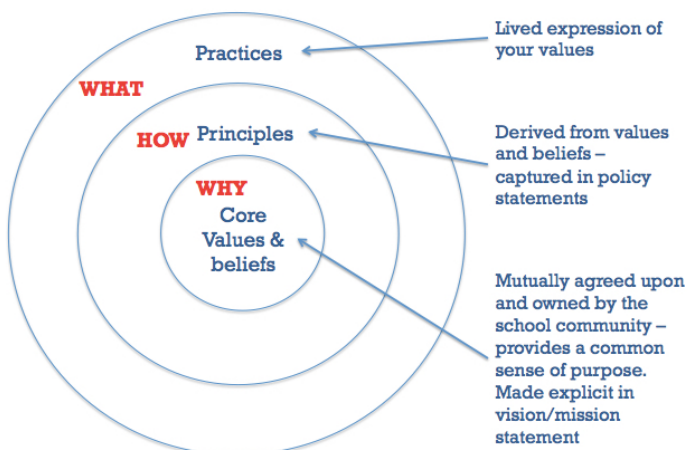
Each of the schools visited reflected their understanding of this process and were explicit in the way they shared their vision, mission and values in a variety of ways around the school including various forms of 'word walls', posters, etc. Some of these are derived from or reflect the vision/mission of the district of the school, while others have been constructed within the community of the school itself.

In discussion with the educators at each of the schools two key issues emerged in relation to how they 'bring their mission to life' in their schools;

    (a) How to make the links explicit between the vision/mission at the centre, and their practices (e.g. pedagogical appraoches, curriculum, assessment, behaviour management etc.) For some the vision/mission provided more of a 'far-off' aspiration for their school community, but when it came to the day to day practices, many of these were decided more by custom and practice, or the personal preferences of teachers or the principal. The issue of how to ensure

this link was brought to life across all areas of the school, and not just evidence in some areas, was also discussed in some visits.

(b) Where there is more of an attempt to be explicit and intentional about how the vision/mission is 'brought to life' on a daily basis, many of the educators spoken with agreed that they feel limited (and sometimes prevented) from fully expressing how they'd like to be able to operate as a result of the requirements made of them by external groups, whether that be the legislative requirements of the state, or the requirement to adopt a new 'curriculum' or approach to assessment made at a district level.

A vision/mission should be a 'living' expression of the school and its community. It should be collaboratively owned and shared and be evident in all of the practices of the school. Without the opportunity to regularly review and align practices with the vision/mission, it becomes simply words on a page and the real drivers of what is happening in the school will be found elsewhere.

The challenge for these schools and their leaders (and the districts that support them) is to regularly reflect on the ways in which the vision/mission is being fulfilled, and to find ways of creating the space (and permission) to introduce the sorts of practices that are aligned with this – all while operating within the legislative requirements of the state and district.

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them reflect on the aspirations for learning in their context include:

1. What informs and shapes the beliefs that inform the vision and values of each school? Are these current and well tested, or are they simply a repetition of what has existed in the past? What is being done to ensure these are current, tested and owned by the community?

2. To what extent are the vision/values at a district level reflected in each school? Should they be the same?

3. Is there a clear line of sight between the beliefs and values of each school and the practices that are observed and experienced by learners? How often is this reflected on and changes made where required?

Future Focus

Future-focused learning prepares students across all curriculum areas and learning stages with skills and capabilities to thrive in a rapidly changing and interconnected world. It connects students and engages their sense of curiosity.

The NZ Curriculum identifies the following Future Focus principles to help guide the design and development of a Future Focused programme of learning:

- **Sustainability**. The curriculum envisions young people: ... "who will seize the opportunities offered by new knowledge and technologies to secure a sustainable social, cultural, economic, and environmental future for our country" (NZC, p. 8).

- **Enterprise**. Enterprise Enterprise involves: ..."exploring what it is to be innovative and entrepreneurial" (NZC, p. 39).

- **Globalisation**. Globalisation is: ..."a series of processes that have caused human activities to become more interconnected and interdependent across the world" (Being Part of Global Communities, 2009, p. 2).

- **Citizenship**. Citizenship can be defined as: ..."the relationship between a person and their community" (Belonging and Participating in Society, 2008, p. 5).

The implications of operating in a constantly evolving environment requires a different approach to leadership and planning – considered as operating in a VUCA environment[15]. Teachers, school leaders and district administrators will need to learn new skills and approaches for designing curriculum, assessment and approaches to learning. Where previously a curriculum may have been designed based on a sense of 'certainty' about what is known (and therefore what needs to be assessed), the modern world requires a more dynamic, responsive and evolving view of curriculum and assessment design, and of change and change management.

The challenge of ensuring that a school is active in providing a 'future focus' across all facets of its curriculum is directly related to the issues identified in the previous section on 'the importance of 'why'. It really comes back to having a clear perspective on the purpose of school and what the drivers are for how it operates.

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them consider the ways in which their programmes of learning are 'future focused' are:

1. Is there a clearly articulated and shared understanding of what a future-focused approach to curriculum design and learning activity is across all schools and districts? (i.e. is this regularly discussed and debated, or is the learning activity focused on more traditional views of what is required as an outcome of learning?)

2. Where, in the values and vision of each school, is there scope for considering the future in this way? How is it enacted? What is being modelled in terms of day to day processes and activity in the school (e.g. environmental concerns, decisions about resource use and waste, global connections etc.)?

3. What opportunities are being taken to expand the world view of students – to have them critically engaging with the social, political, environmental and economic issues that will affect them in their lives into the future.

Shifting the Ownership of Learning

Shifting the ownership of learning signals a reversing of the "logic" of education systems so that the system is built around the learner, rather than the learner being required to "fit" with the system. Shifting the ownership of learning aligns with the idea that education systems must move away from an Industrial Age "one-size-fits-all" model that has prevailed over the past two hundred years.

Understanding the significance of this shift is essential if true personalisation of learning is to occur. Personalisation must be about more than simply providing student's with choices – yet still providing instruction in a traditional mode.

This trend is evident in a number of initiatives and areas of emphasis that have been given priority both nationally and internationally over the past few years, including:

- Personalisation
- Self-directed, self-managing and self-regulated learning
- Learner agency
- Student voice

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[15] VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, a combination of qualities that, taken together, characterize the nature of some difficult conditions and situations. The term VUCA originated with the United States Army War College to describe conditions resulting from the Cold War. The VUCA concept has since been adopted throughout businesses and organizations in many industries and sectors to guide leadership and strategy planning.

Giving learners voice encourages them to participate in and eventually to own and drive their learning. This means a complete shift from the traditional approach of teaching compliance that develops a "learned helplessness" to encouraging voice where there is authenticity in the learning.

The concept of student agency transforms the notion of student voice to a completely different level. Agency invokes action, responsibility, mutual engagement and respect. The student is a "learning agent" whose self-efficacy makes the difference to their learning.

The concept of student agency was present in all of the schools visited in some form at least. While the stimulation for this has been, in part at least, driven by what was observed in the NZ visit, it was noticeable that the school leaders and teachers require more professional support to reach a shared understanding of what learner agency is all about, and how this 'shift in ownership' of learning might be achieved with in the context of the NW Arkansas education system. Further, an exploration of how the aspiration of this 'shift in ownership' may be achieved is required given the significant level of compliance reported by teachers and leaders to meet the mandated requirements of district/state that, in many cases, give the appearance of supporting the status quo and/or preventing such a shift to occur.

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them consider what it means to 'shift the ownership' of learning and encourage greater levels of learner agency are:

1. What further steps might schools and teachers take to shift the ownership of learning so that learners are more fully involved in the design and assessment of their own learning (in age and stage-appropriate ways)?

2. What are some of the things that teachers currently do for learners that, with the appropriate scaffolds and supports, the learners could begin to do for themselves?

3. How does student voice feature as a part of what is happening on a daily basis? Is it merely about enabling the learners to express ideas and opinions, or does it involve activism and student leadership?

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is linked strongly with the notion of personalised learning. It begins with understanding that each student is defined by their language, culture and identity, and that when this is recognised and embraced, the learner is more likely to flourish in his/her learning and reach his/her potential as a learner and as a human being.

Cultural Competence is increasingly important in schools because of the increasingly diverse communities being served and the significant educational outcome disparities that are emerging as a result, some of which are caused by inequitable access to education services.

Having strategies and approaches in place to address issues relating to equity, culture and diversity are becoming increasingly important at all levels of our education system, particularly as we see an increasing mix of cultures in the schools as a result of global migrations as well as refugee re-settlement. The ability for educators to learn how to work with and teach students from different backgrounds is critical to the success of the educational system.

In many of the schools observed it was encouraging to see the celebration of cultures, and the integration of some elements of those cultures in the way schools operate (i.e. naming of teams and spaces etc.) There is a need, however, for this recognition of culture to move beyond simply being about increasing awareness of other cultures to focusing on developing the capacity in educators (and the system) to bring together many different behaviours, attitudes, and policies and work effectively

in cross-cultural settings to produce better outcomes for all learners. Cultural competency is a key factor in enabling educators to be effective with students from cultures other than their own.

A concern expressed by some educators when this was discussed during the visits was that efforts to embrace cultural diversity may be seen as a form of cultural appropriation – and indeed, this is a risk if the matter is addressed simply at a superficial level (e.g. celebrating cultural days, use of language for naming things etc.) This is where it is important to understand the many dimensions of culture, and how these all contribute to creating the disposition for learning in the child. It is important to embrace not simply the child, but the family and the community of that culture within the school. In practical terms, educators should be actively seeking to invite the family and community members into dialogue with them to find what they may bring and share that is authentic and of value. In so doing, a deeper understanding of the aspects of culture that may form different world views will become apparent, and ways in which these can be accommodated within the curriculum explored together.

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them consider the extent to which their schools and practice are culturally responsive are:

1. What is being done in each school/district to address the issues of cultural bias, racism and discrimination that is still felt by some students? How can schools work more effectively to achieve a culture of cultural responsiveness among staff and students?

2. In what ways might families and communities be involved in the development of such a culture?

3. In what ways does the aspiration of cultural competence appear within the vision and values of each school? How might this be made even more explicit?

Creating different view of success

For the last two decades "evidence-based decision-making" has been a mantra for policymakers, politicians and influential media. What is measured matters. Policy-makers, educators, parents, and the public want to know if our schools are successful; they want evidence of what is working well and where the education system is falling short.

The current 'testing' regime that previals in the districts in which schools were observed runs counter to the global emphasis now being given to 'competency based education' and the development of capabilities as being defined by the OECD for example.

PISA states in their Handbook on Global Competence[16]:

> *"Every school should encourage its students to try and make sense of the most pressing issues defining our times. The high demands placed on schools to help their students cope and succeed in an increasingly interconnected environment can only be met if education systems define new learning objectives based on a solid framework, and use different types of assessment to reflect on the effectiveness of their initiatives and teaching practices. In this context, PISA aims to provide a comprehensive overview of education systems' efforts to create learning environments that invite young people to understand the world beyond their immediate environment, interact with others with respect for their rights and dignity, and take action towards building sustainable and thriving communities. A fundamental goal of this work is to support evidence-based decisions on how to improve curricula, teaching, assessments and*

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[16] https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2018-global-competence.htm

schools' responses to cultural diversity in order to prepare young people to become global citizens."

The use of lines of learning observed in many schools is a useful start towards understanding the nature of learning in this way and how it might be assessed. The caution here is that it runs the danger of becoming too 'atomised' when the focus becomes too narrowly focused on specific learning steps. The longer-term goal is to develop teacher proficiency in the use of progressions and the development of assessment rubrics that can be used by teachers and students. Key here is the adoption of research-based frameworks around which rubrics can be designed, so ensure coherence across all subjects and all areas of the school (and district?).

Further information and an expansion of this thinking can be found in the CORE Education Ten Trends for 2019 on this topic.[17]

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them consider how best to acknowledge and celebrate success in learning are:

1. How can more evidence-based assessment approaches be introduced into the learning programmes in these classrooms – where the assessment becomes a part of the learning process, not the 'judgement' made at the end?

2. What sorts of supports and scaffolds might be introduced to enable learners to take greater ownership of building their evidence portfolios, and their ability to match this evidence to the criteria for the learning task?

3. What needs to be 'let go' in order for this new way of thinking about success and assessment to evolve? What could be done to lessen the emphasis on regular testing, while not neglecting the rigor around monitoring and reporting on individual student learning?

Pedagogy and Space

In recent years there has been an emerging body of research that supports the link between pedagogical practice and the design and use of learning space. Our traditional 'school room' model of one teacher with one class in one room etc. Is becoming increasingly 'stressed' in a modern world where approaches to learning involve having access to a variety of spaces, each designed to support a different type of learning activity.

Many of the modern learning environments being built around the world today promote and support a range of pedagogies including delivering, applying, creating, communicating and decision-making. They are often centred around a student 'home base' where a lot of the teaching and learning occurs, and these bases provide access to a variety of other learning spaces. Modern learning environments support strengths-based teaching and can offer students and teachers flexibility, openness and access to resources. Providing teachers with an open, flexible learning environment where inquiries are shared, interventions devised collaboratively and reflections based on both self and peer observations, can lead to the development of a robust, continuously improving community of practice.

Understanding the link between pedagogy and space is thus critical to designing the types of learning experiences that will promote the development of knowledge, skills and dispositions that most of the schools visited have identified in their vision/mission, learning qualities and graduate profiles.

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[17] http://core-ed.org/research-and-innovation/ten-trends/2019/understanding-success/

While it may not be possible to simply change the physical structures that exist currently, three things stand out from the visits that were made that could be the focus of further thought and planning at a school and/or district level:

(a) More creative thought may be given to how existing spaces may be used more flexibly to create the sort of overall experience for learners described above. For instance, a 'set' of adjacent 'classrooms' might together be considered a shared learning space, with students and teachers able to move between them to find the type of learning space suited to the sort of learning they are engaging in.

(b) Thought needs to be given to how the corridor space and outdoor space may be used as a part of this 'shared' learning space design. This will include re-thinking issues of supervision and responsibility of learners when using these spaces.

(c) Where new builds or modifications to existing structures are undertaken, the first stage in the planning process should be an engagement with the educators to understand their pedagogical approaches and to ensure that provision is made for more flexible use of space into the future.

When thinking about learning space we should not be limited only to the notion of physical learning spaces provided in places we call schools. Consideration should also be given to the fact that students learn in spaces at home, in libraries and other community spaces – as well as in virtual spaces including both formal (e.g. learning management systems) and informal (e.g. social platforms) environments.

A number of links to research and resources on this topic have been provided in the resource section at the end of this report.

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them consider the ways in which learning space is used to support or enable the desired approaches to teaching and learning are:

1. In what ways can the existing spaces be transformed to enable the sorts of personalised learning practices that many of the teachers in these schools aspire to – including ways of enabling both learners and teachers to work more collaboratively?

2. How could changes be made to the structural design of some spaces to allow for more open, flexible and purposeful learning space design to evolve?

3. In what ways can the use of outdoor space be better utilised as a part of the overall learning space design?

Digital Technologies

Increased access to digital technologies can enable more inclusive and personalised learning pathways through the curriculum, especially for those students with specific learning needs. While there is clear evidence that technology can improve learning outcomes, many studies suggest that technology may not always be used in a way that prompts richer forms of learning. School leadership that integrates the digital world into the curriculum and teaching and learning approach in a strategic, and not piecemeal, way is a part of creating an effective digital learning environment for children.

All of the schools visited provide access to digital devices for their learners to use as a part of their learning programme. Most classrooms were equipped with data projectors, interactive whiteboards or LED monitors to enable both teachers and students to share work with the class. During our visits we observed these digital devices being used in a range of ways, including;

- Practising subject-specific skills. In many schools the devices were being used to engage with applications that build skill and understanding in particular subject areas (e.g. maths) where the repeated practice of skills together with the feedback provided to individual learners made them both motivating and engaging for the learner.

- Researching using the internet, either individually or as a group.

- Students creating documents or slideshows and sharing these on the large screens.

- Some schools are using platforms such as SeeSaw as a means of enabling learners to share evidence of learning with their teacher and with parents.

- Some teachers were using Google Classroom to share content for learners to access independently and guide their self-directed learning.

- In one school devices were observed being used to programme and control the flight of drones.

This pattern of use reflects the reported use of digital technologies in classrooms in many other jurisdictions, with the dominant amounts of time being given to the first three items in this list. The challenge for schools and educators is to find ways of shifting this focus to include more of the sorts of activity that involves higher order thinking, and where the use of the device achieves more than simply replicated what was previously done using traditional media to doing things that may not previously have been possible. The use of the SAMR model was discussed with some teachers as a framework for setting such goals.

When it comes to the use of digital technologies in education there is a tendency to assume that children born into a digital era, where the use of internet- enabled devices is everywhere (their homes, their playrooms and the schools), will by default have digital skills and knowledge. While it can be true that a child's natural curiosity may make them more prepared to explore the affordances of digital devices, it is also true that this same curiosity, without consistent and appropriate modelling and guidance, can leave them vulnerable to some of the dangers associated with their use – everything from the development of postural and eyesight problems, to falling prey to cyber-bullying and exposure to inappropriate material. The provision of secure and protected online environments within the schools is one part of addressing this – but the other is to ensure there is an explicit emphasis on educating about the issues associated with safe and responsible use of the technologies. This is particularly effective when this process involves the learners and their parents, and is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school.

It was noted that the devices provided are for in-school use only and are not available to be taken home by the students. This is always a perplexing question, as issues of care of the device, loss and theft, and of online safety at home all become concerns. However, when remote learning is used appropriately, it can have great benefits including flexibility of location or allowing students to learn content from home. This frees up school time for more collaborative work with their peers or focusing on specific areas with their teachers. Additionally, there is an equity issue that emerges where students may be being encouraged to access their learning from home using a home-owned device – but where not all students have access to this in their homes.

Some questions to ponder as the educators involved in this project, the schools they are in and the districts that support them consider how best to integrate digital technologies into learning are:

1. In what ways is the use of these devices used assisting learners to develop their agency as learners, to genuinely develop as confident, connected, life-long learners – able to make choices about their learning (how they engage, how they represent it etc.)?

2. How might the use of digital devices assist learners with learning that requires higher order thinking, and achieving things they cannot using traditional methods and media?

3. How might access to digital learning be extended to the learner's homes – and how might concerns about equity be addressed in doing so?

Part Three: Conclusion

He aha te mea nui o tea ao
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

What is the most important thing in the world?
It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

Much has been achieved in these schools in the two years since the visit to New Zealand. It has been encouraging and inspiring to see the level of professional engagement with the ideas and examples these educators were introduced to during the tour of NZ schools, and how some of these have been brought back and used to inform locally developed solutions and innovations in practice.

The opportunity to visit each of these schools, to observe the practices in place and to discuss the underlying beliefs and values that are informing these has been a richly rewarding experience for all. The observations and reflections in this report are intended to act as a form of constructive encouragement to those involved, that they may continue to incorporate innovative ideas and thinking in their practice, to be prepared to be challenged and change, and to do this with an unwavering eye on the horizon that is the future for the learners currently engaged in these schools.

In doing this it is important to remember what schools exist for – not the curriculum, not the assessment practices, not the buildings or the resources, it is the students. Everything follows from having our eyes firmly fixed on each learner as a uniquely able individual, and their family who support them. The rest becomes important once we have this right.

We need to understand the school and everyone associated with it – the district, teachers, parents, students, community members etc. – as an *ecosystem*, where every part is inextricably linked and where life is sustained through the healthy relationships that exists, with everyone participating and contributing. This means breaking down silos of activity, and breaking down the 'walls' of the classroom and school (metaphorically) to enable the flow of support and encouragement for learners and their learning to be allowed to flourish.

For many in schools, the *culture of accountability* focuses so much on the learning and not on the learner. A key theme in this report highlights how it is the culture of assessment through testing that is seen as a barrier to implementing the sorts of pedagogical approaches that are truly innovative, where teaching is de-privatised and where learners are given agency to be driving their own learning. This needs to change if the progress made to date is to be sustained and the aspirations of these educators to be fully realised.

Lastly, for those involved in leadership in the system, whether at state, district or school level, the challenge is to *lead forward*. Many of the discussions with leaders at all levels showed a pre-occupation with data and addressing the gaps – with system level rewards encouraging this behaviour. Whilst completely laudable activity, without a future-focused approach all this will ever do is create a better version of what we've always had – and that simply won't do in terms of preparing our young people for their future. True innovation requires being prepared to take risks, within a 'fail fast – fix fast' environment – so that new ideas, new approaches and new solutions have an opportunity to flourish – and so too our children, the future generation.

Part Four: Resources

He aha te kai ō te rangatira? He kōrero, he kōrero, he kōrero

What is the food of the leader? It is knowledge, it is communication.

The readings and resources below were referred to during discussions with educators at different points in this visit and are included here for reference and to inform the ongoing professional dialogue in each school and district.

Personalisation and learner agency

- [Motivation, engagement and voice](): This report synthesizes research on achievement motivation, school engagement, and student voice, concluding that the more educators use student-centered approaches to reinforce student agency, the more motivation and engagement are likely to rise. https://studentsatthecenterhub.org/resource/motivation-engagement-and-student-voice/
- OECD definition: "The capacity to behave as purposeful, reflective, responsible social beings, actively seeking to achieve goals that have been understood and endorsed - http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/student-agency/in_brief_Student_Agency.pdf
- Video of Derek Wenmoth speaking on Leaner agency: http://edtalks.org/#/video/ten-trends-2014-agency
- [Shifting the ownership of learning]() – useful framework to guide discussion and decision making, probably needs an explanation of how it is used with a group as part of a PLD session
- [Learner agency literature review]() - published by the CORE Ed team last year - heaps of useful stuff in here
- [What is student agency]() - a podcast interview between two CORE Ed staff
- [Learner agency]() - from our CORE's trends 2014, [and again in 2015](), [and yet again in 2017]()
- [Personalised Learning brief]() – an interview with National thought leaders and practitioners (US)

Learning Environments

- Key website for ILE research: Melbourne University - http://www.iletc.com.au/
- CORE Education ILE Matrix - http://www.core-ed.org/professional-learning-solutions/how-you-teach/innovative-learning-environment-planning-matrix/innovative-learning-environment-matrix/
- Linking pedagogy and Space, Kenn Fisher – older now but he is a leading thinker in this area: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/documents/school/principals/infrastructure/pedagogyspace.pdf
- A Systematic Review of the Effects of Learning Environments on Student Learning Outcomes Terry Byers, Marian Mahat, Kirra Liu, Anne Knock and Wesley Imms (University of Melbourne 2018) http://www.iletc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TR4_Web.pdf

- An ambitious study of 153 classrooms in the United Kingdom provides the best evidence that flexible spaces can boost academic performance. https://www.edutopia.org/article/flexible-classrooms-research-scarce-promising

- Designing Libraries: http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/?PageID=89

Culturally Responsive Practice

- Cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy (Waikato University) https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/journals/set/downloads/2018_1_003_1.pdf

- Tataiako - Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners A resource for use with the Graduating Teacher Standards and Practising Teacher Criteria - https://teachingcouncil.nz/sites/default/files/Tataiako_0.pdf

- Videos of educators featuring perspectives on culturally responsive practice in schools - https://edtalks.org/#/search/cultural%20responsiveness

- Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain – by Zaretta Hammond https://crtandthebrain.com/about/

- Building Cultural Capability - video and downloadable planning resource from CORE Education

Assessment, rubrics and progressions

- SOLO Taxonomy – (stands for the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome) is a means of classifying learning outcomes in terms of their complexity, enabling us to assess students' work in terms of its quality not of how many bits of this and of that they have got right. For an excellent introduction and access to resources on this see the site of NZ Educator, Pam Hook - http://pamhook.com/solo-taxonomy/

- Assessment for learning - https://assessment.tki.org.nz/ - the official site for the NZ Ministry of Education for everything to do with assessment – loads of resources here

- The Literacy Learning Progressions (one of the professional tools provided to support the New Zealand Curriculum) – downloadable as a PDF - http://www.literacyprogressions.tki.org.nz/

- Numeracy Progressions – NZ has these tied up in a tool created by the MoE but only available to NZ schools – here is a link to a set of progressions created by a NZ school (who are part of our NPDL project) that might be informative - https://www.clevedon.school.nz/files/5aa6fb60faa93f87/folders/11/MathsProgressions-Numberandalgebra.pdf

Project based learning, passion projects etc.

- A page of links to useful information and examples of practice in NZ schools around project based learning, passion projects etc. - http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Future-focused-learning/Project-based-learning

- An NZ example of a passion project at secondary level - http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Future-focused-learning/Student-inquiry/Passion-projects

- A page of links and useful information about STEM/STEAM approaches in NZ - http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Future-focused-learning/STEM-STEAM

Digital Technologies for Learning

- eLearning Planning Framework – developed by a team at CORE for the Ministry of Education – provides a rubric approach to developing a strategic development of capability for individual staff and the whole school - http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Professional-learning/e-Learning-Planning-Framework

- Digital Technologies in the curriculum – launch page on the NZ site for teachers, see the links to examples of ICT use in specific curriculum areas across the top of the page - http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Curriculum-areas/Digital-Technologies-in-the-curriculum

- SAMR model – a practical guide for Ed Tech integration - https://www.schoology.com/blog/samr-model-practical-guide-edtech-integration

Research:

- **Understanding children's use and experience with digital technologies** - Final research report by a group of NZ researchers on the use of ICTs in NZ schools - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318866818_Understanding_children's_use_and_experience_with_digital_technologies_Final_research_report

- **Digital technologies for learning**: Findings from the NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools 2016 - https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/digital-technologies-learning-national-survey

- **Does Educational Technology Help Students Learn**? An analysis of the connection between digital devices and learning by Helen Lee Bouygues (June 2019) - https://reboot-foundation.org/does-educational-technology-help-students-learn/

Global research, reports and frameworks

- The **Worldwide Educating for the Future Index** is the first global index that examines education system inputs across 35 economies. It was commissioned by the Yidan Prize Foundation and created by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). – see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WOHu3ooSxs

- **"Innovative Learning Environments" (ILE)** led by the OECD is an influential international reflection that addresses some of the big questions being asked such as; "What does redesigning schools and schooling through innovation mean in practice? How might it be brought about?" http://www.oecd.org/education/schooling-redesigned-9789264245914-en.htm

- **The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire** Practice is essential reading for all those interested in knowing what research has to say about how to optimise learning in classrooms, schools and other settings. It aims, first and foremost, to inform practice and educational reform. http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/thenatureoflearningusingresearchtoinspirepractice.htm

- **The Future of Education and Skills: Education** 2030 - The aim of the project is to help countries find answers to two far-reaching questions: "What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will today's students need to thrive and shape their world?" and "How can instructional systems develop these knowledge, skills, attitudes and values effectively?" https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf

- **CORE's Ten Trends** - http://core-ed.org/research-and-innovation/ten-trends/2019/