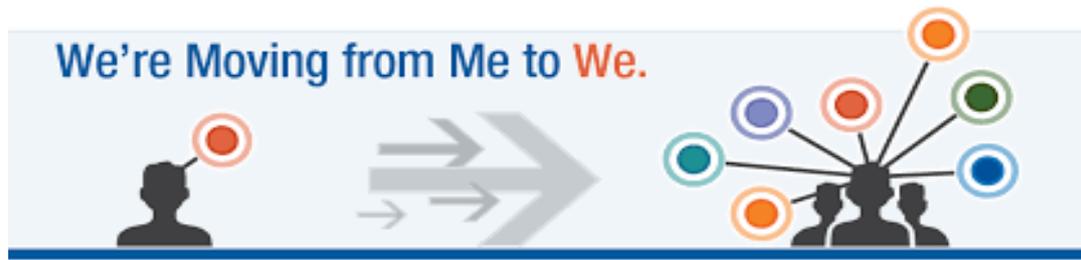

Changing teachers' mindsets to work collaboratively in Innovative Learning Environments: Executive Summary



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Carolyn Marino 2016

Our goals for the 21 century learner go beyond the imparting of known knowledge. Today learners are being asked to produce new knowledge both on their own and with others. This requires a well developed intellect, where the learner can think flexibly, creatively and thoughtfully.

While we have a growing understanding of **why** and **what** needs to change to develop an adaptable learning-focused environment, more problematic is the **how**.

If we are asking children to be able to construct their own understanding by working collaboratively with others on authentic problems, our teachers need to be able to undertake this process themselves.

Many of today's teachers are happily making shifts and adding new skills to their repertoire as schools introduce new learning spaces, use new modes of learning and adopt new technologies. However, this type of adaptation on its own, is not enough to produce the step change in teachers' thinking needed for effective future oriented education. Gilbert and Bull (2015) (p 2)

What is this transformation they need to make? Much of my reading during my fellowship centred on an exploration of the concept of transformational learning and the contexts required to promote deep and profound change in the way we deliver education today. As I traveled around the world, I gained a greater appreciation that political context, beliefs and ideologies further complicate the decisions that countries are making to answer the question - what is the purpose of education and how should it be delivered?

Underpinning my recommendations, are a set of understandings I have gleaned from my Fellowship research:

1. Transformational learning is founded on a deep exploration of one's own beliefs (mental models) regarding student centred learning, collaborative practice and the myriad of other practices and behaviours, that educators perform on a daily basis.
2. Teams of teachers working in collaborative flexible learning environments, have the opportunity to maximise on many of the conditions required for effective collaborative practice to flourish.
3. Teaching teams need time and multiple opportunities together to undertake deep learning. This occurs through collaborative inquiry into their practice and the impact it has on student outcomes.
4. Principals and school leadership teams have a fundamental part to play in developing, nurturing and sustaining the culture where a compelling vision for learning can be allowed to infiltrate and drive all decision making.

From this set of beliefs, the following recommendations are made for schools looking at supporting the change in teachers mindsets to those needed to work in collaborative ways.

SHARED VISION: Clarity of Purpose & Alignment

In all the schools where collaboration was working effectively, there was evidence of a **strong shared vision and an alignment of beliefs, values and moral purpose**, regardless of the political context.

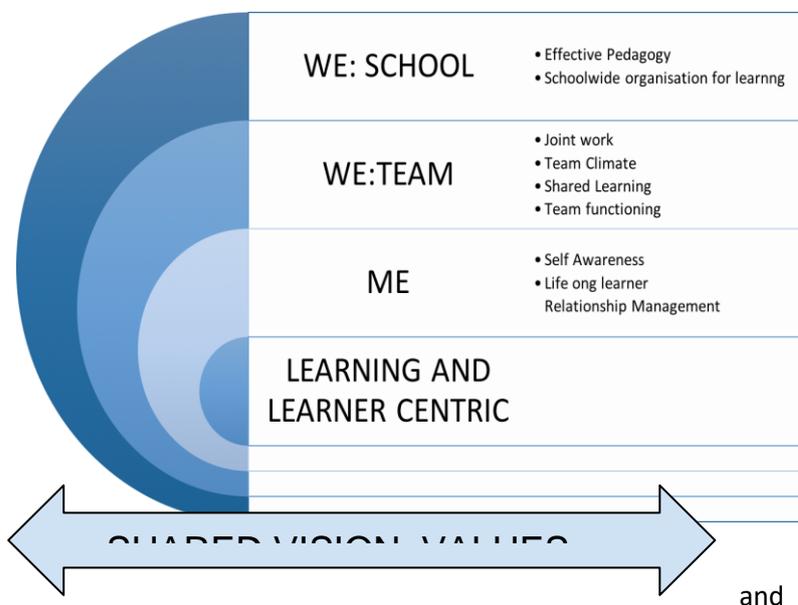
Teachers need a compelling learning-focused vision, that motivates, unifies and guides their day to day decisions. Vision statements must be generated collaboratively and must be alive in the hearts and hands of everyone in the organisation. Clear guidelines, expectations and aligned practices help ensure everyone feels they are on the same page, and when difficult decisions need to be made, the purpose (and not the wants and needs of the loudest voices) offers direction.

Take a Systems Thinking Approach when planning for change

Creating an alignment across all aspects of a system to ensure the conditions for change are in place, is hard work. To assist me to analyse my case studies and structure my findings, I developed a diagram to make sense of the conditions necessary to foster collaboration.

Fundamental to the success of any change process is the shift in the beliefs and values and vision of the people who will enact and BE the change. It starts with **ME** - then a consideration of the **TEAM** - and how **SCHOOL** systems and structures can support enable collaboration and change.

Underpinning all levels is an alignment with a shared vision for learning.



and

A Framework for Thinking about Systems Change
Adapted from Kloster, Villa, Thousand (2006)
 From "Restructuring for caring and effective education: piecing the puzzle together (pp. 93-128)

	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	Confusion
Vision	+		+	Incentives	+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Vision	+	Skills	+		+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	Resistance
Vision	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+		+	Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+	Resources	+		=	False Starts
Vision	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	Change

The literature reinforced what many leaders shared with me; that for true shifts in teachers' behaviour to occur we must be willing to challenge their thinking and their beliefs, to interrupt their patterns and short circuit the conviction to their logic even when it feels uncomfortable.

The government's advocacy of innovative learning environments requires a systems thinking approach, not just at a school level but at a national level as well. This diagram, "A Framework for Thinking about Systems Change" is very useful, in that it highlights the outcomes of a missing piece in the complex process of change.

Schools need to strategically plan for change. They are complex places. The introduction of changes to the provision of space has had far reaching consequences across schools. It can be difficult to have "all our ducks in line" at the same time, but being aware of the negative effect of a missing piece, can support and go some way to helping you address this.

LEADERSHIP - Actively manage for the Implementation Dip

Michael Fullen (2001) writes "We are more likely to learn something from people who disagree with us than we are from people who agree."

At the start of any new learning there can be enthusiasm, interest and optimism but as the effort of the changes required becomes evident, confidence can drop and performance levels can fall into the "dip". If leaders are aware of this they can do a number of things to ensure the dip isn't too deep or too long lasting:

- observe and listen to concerns to encourage trust in the leadership and the change process
- be optimistic - keep communicating the vision and be optimistic about the outcomes of learning

- stay clearly focused on the vision but be willing to adjust and adapt in the face of feedback and emerging issues
- Fullen (2013) talks about having “skinny” change plans without too much detail in the beginning. People are hard to predict.
- Look for quick wins - those early signs of success; publicise and celebrate these.
- Keep an eye on potential barriers to change and either strengthen the positive forces or reduce or eliminate the barriers.

As adults we can forget the frustration, and angst of feeling uncertain and unclear and be rather intolerant to it!

Professional learning and growth opportunities embedded into classroom practice

Teacher professional learning is most effective when it is dynamic, ongoing, continuous and set into teachers’ daily lives. The research highlights the following characteristics.

Effective professional learning:

- Takes time and effort- it is hard work!
- has a clear theoretical rationale grounded in research and a strong knowledge base
- is based on collaborative, *active learning*¹ and teaching, as well as feedback
- is delivered to a team of teachers
- is focused and specific helping teachers develop the pedagogical skills to teach specific content and/or skills
- is coherent, practical, focused on student learning and the examination of their work in relation to the benchmarks students are working towards

The work of Robert Kegan on the *Stages of Adult Development* was very useful in helping me understand that each of us has a “way of knowing” that filters our experiences of ourselves, others and our relationships. To change or grow involves a qualitative change in the way we make sense of or construct our experiences - the process we go through to do this is referred to as transformational learning. It is a person's way of “*knowing*” that dictates how a new learning experience will be managed and understood. This has important implications for how we support the professional learning of our teachers.

Differentiated and collaborative professional learning

Professional learning needs to be both differentiated for the individual **AND** collaborative in nature.

By exploring how we can differentiate our school based professional learning programmes to accommodate the different “ways of knowing” staff may exhibit, will support individuals to:

- identify and articulate their current beliefs
- experience and acknowledge cognitive dissonance - i.e. when they are exposed to situations and ideas that conflict with or are not readily available to be incorporated into their existing schema
- give them opportunities to explore these feelings of confusion, frustration and challenge to learn new ways of being and “knowing”.

How an individual teacher interprets the change processes they are experiencing can help determine the support required. Many schools have developed *Effective Teacher matrices* or other *rubrics* to help staff understand more clearly where they are at on a developmental continuum and what the next steps could look like. By using strategies like self-review then peer-share, teachers are encouraged to make sense of their understanding of new ideas, and through dialogue with others, to connect this with their prior knowledge.

Working on joint projects provides a basis for inquiry and reflection, that can help teachers to deprivatize their practice. A staff culture of mutual learning, monitoring and commitment to collaborative inquiry is found to be a key feature of effective schools. (Darling- Hammond & Richardson 2009)

Establish strong coaching cultures as a mechanism to support differentiated learning

Coaching is a process that has the power to unlock a person’s potential; it enables the individual to learn, rather than being the recipient of teaching and it takes an optimistic view of future possibilities. Suggett (2012)

¹ Active learning should include opportunities for reciprocal observation, co planning and co teaching, and sharing learning through talking, writing

p 175) Furthermore, it is a flexible process that can be tailored to meet the needs of individuals regardless of their 'way of knowing'.

Establishing a coaching culture helps both those coaching and those being coached to gain some perspective into their actions, and the beliefs and assumptions that underpin these. This approach to professional growth fits very comfortably alongside a mindset of learning being a shared responsibility and was evident in a number of schools I visited who were working towards a culture of distributive leadership and shared norms and beliefs.

Develop Space Literacy in our teachers

We cannot assume teachers can move into large, collaborative learning spaces and automatically know how to utilise the space to optimise learning opportunities. Teachers require a better understanding of how the use of space can be an enabler for changing ways of thinking and being, and a tool to enhance different ways of teaching and learning together.

TIME Matters!

Asking teachers to shift to working in learning focused relationships with colleagues, on a daily basis, adds a significant layer of complexity to the teaching process. When teachers have shared ownership of groups of learners, they need to spend time together to make explicit their learning intentions, to plan, implement and adapt their practice.

Reflection and dialogue are at the heart of transformational learning, and to do this well, in ways that honour and develop the individual and team's self efficacy, takes time.

In NZ primary schools, where teachers already work 30 hours a week face to face with learners, with 1 hour a week mandated for in class release, time is a **significant** barrier to the success of effective collaborative relationships. In Finland teachers have a maximum of 20 contact time with the remaining 10 hours given to collaborative work, planning, reflection and learning.

This issue must be addressed at both an industrial level and within each school.

With Thanks

As the recipient of the ASB/APPA Travelling Fellowship for 2016, I have been able to glean a broader understanding of what challenges educationalists are facing, as they endeavour to work in new collaborative ways.

The Fellowship funding has given me a unique opportunity to visit and walk alongside students, teachers, principals, consultants and academics from around the world and across New Zealand.

Thank you to the ASB whose financial support allowed me to travel and further explore my areas of passion. It has been a privilege to have this time in my career for deep learning and reflection. I hope my thoughts will promote ongoing dialogue, with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for all learners in our schools (the adults and children alike!)

Whakatauki

***Tūngia te ururoa kia tupu whakaritorito te tutū o te harakeke
Set the overgrown bush alight, and the new flax shoots will spring up***

In order to change we may need to leave some things behind to allow us to do things differently