New School, New Journey

Adolescents
Emotions & Mindset
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By Paula Wine

What we know about adolescent development

Adolescence, as we all know, is a time characterised by significant changes as kids grow and develop into young adults. Our Year 7-10 students will be developing emotionally, physically, and intellectually. This is a special time, like no other. Many of our kids will breeze through, while others may be more at risk. One thing we do know is that our young people are growing up in a far more complicated world than when we did.

What the research says

In adolescents the frontal lobe (controlling 'executive function', or the ability to manage impulses and consider long-term consequences, [National Institute of Mental Health, 2015] operates at only about half of its total function because the brain is not fully developed until, on average, the age of 21 for girls and 25 for boys. Therefore adolescence is a time when brain development can be impacted by the risks that teenagers naturally take (Barrett, 2010).
Teenagers look to their friends and peers for acceptance; this is central to their confidence and well-being.
 Emerging adolescents begin to move away from dependence on their family and become more autonomous in their actions and decision-making. Yet, paradoxically they still need love and acceptance from the adults around them.
One of our core principals is 'Emotions are Integral', reflecting this understanding around our Year 7-10 learners,

and how year 7-10 is period of rapid change. We know that if emotions are wobbly or volatile, learning can't happen. When things go wrong (as they will do because it is part of growing up, to make mistakes) we will teach Restorative Practices to put things right, ensuring that our young people are empowered to take responsibility for their actions. By being active participants in the restorative process, they can learn from their mistakes and develop skills to use the next time they have a conflict or a problem.

Teens are developing an awareness of self, and they have an increasing need for independence and responsibility. Therefore, by designing programmes to encourage student agency, we will be responding to this need for choice and control. "Children who plan their own goals, set weekly schedules and evaluate their own work build up their frontal cortex and take more control over their lives" (Bruce Feiler, How Kids Can Help Parents Manage Their Lives). We know that our adolescent learners are more likely to be motivated and engaged in learning when they have a voice in their learning.

We also recognise that cognition and emotion work together; emotions are the 'gatekeepers of learning'. When a sense of belonging is established through strong connections this fosters a real sense of well-being and learning can flourish. In studies looking at what happens to students when they move schools, the single greatest predictor of subsequent success is whether the students make a friend within the first month of starting the new school (Galton et al, 2000; Pratt and George, 2005). So it is vital that all of our students feel welcomed and have opportunities to develop friendships and a sense of belonging (Hattie, 2012).

Sadly, anxiety disorders represent the most common form of psychological distress in childhood and youth (Carwright-Hatten, McNicol, & Doubleday, 2006). In adolescents, depression and anxiety may manifest as negative self-talk ("I'm hopeless" or "I'm useless"), pessimism, antisocial behaviour and alienated feelings of being misunderstood. Anxiety in childhood is the most common risk factor for depression in adolescence and early adulthood (Barrett, et al, 2006). We need to help our learners to develop resilience and coping skills.

We also need to be looking for the canary in the mine…(a useful metaphor dating back to when miners used to send canaries into the mine because they are extraordinarily sensitive to poisons in the air; any signs of distress would indicate to the miners that the conditions were unsafe and not to go into the mine). The 'Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale' is a free resource that can be downloaded and used as an instrument to indicate presence of anxiety. It is not a diagnosis by any means, but can be a helpful questionnaire for parents and teachers. Early noticing of anxiety, and intervention, is essential because children who suffer from high anxiety are also more likely to experience anxiety when they are adults (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009). We know that negative thinking and anxiety can be an obstacle to learning (and wellbeing), so one of our Flight Times will be "My Friends - Youth Resilience Program" to build emotional resilience and problem-solving abilities. This is an optional program that encourages and builds peer and other support networks. More information is available at www.pathwayshrc.com.au where you will find FRIENDS Programs evidence-based abstracts. We know, given that anxiety disorders develop early in life, effective intervention and prevention programs can be helpful for young people and their families. (Interestingly this morning's NZ Herald reports on Hobsonville Point Secondary School skipping NCEA Level 1, making the decision to switch to a two-year NCEA Level 2 programme after reviewing the Education Review Office's report on well-being, the report finding that over-assessing children leads to anxiety, depression and eating disorders. But that's a whole other discussion requiring a separate blog post.)

At our school each student will be part of an Advisory group, a small group of students (15-17) with one Advisory teacher. The vertical groupings will encourage opportunities for ako (reciprical learning) and foster tuakana/teina (older guiding younger 'sibling'). During the Advisory time we will focus on hauora (well-being), develop learning to learn skills, and foster a sense of belonging. Hauora is a Māori philosophy of health; it comprises taha tinana (physical well-being), taha hinengaro (mental and emotional well-being), taha whanau (social well-being), and taha wairua (spiritual well-being) (tki, Ministry of Education).

Our Advisory System

A way for our learners to be part of a small community - a group of other students they connect with and get to know very well. The Advisory Teacher will know your child very well.

The Advisory Teacher becomes the advocate for each student, the point of contact for families, and helps to maintain the 'parent participation' throughout the junior high learning journey. Advisory Teachers track learning progress, identify needs and help set goals.

The Learning Advisory teacher will also help with...

- academic decision making
- developing 'learning to learn' skills
- developing their CLOAK of learner attributes
- ensuring personal and educational needs are being met
- developing social skills and problem solving abilities
- supporting learners through their RJHS journey

In addition to fostering friendship, student agency and a safe learning environment, we will endeavour to help our students challenge their mindset. Carol Dweck's 'Mindset: The New Psychology of Success' (2008) talks about those with a fixed mindset (who will crumble under pressure or challenge, give up, and doubt their own abilities) versus those with a growth mindset (those who revel in a challenge, and will seek advice or help when something is difficult). The Learning Challenge was developed James Nottingham (2010) as a way to promote children's self-esteem and resilience by engaging in challenge and inquiry. He created a 4-step inquiry process (Concept-Challenge-Construct-Consider), and later incorporated this process into a "pit" analogy. We really like this analogy, and we will use it with our learners to help them build resilience and problem-solving strategies for 'getting out of the pit' when learning is challenging. This, we know, is vital to our emerging adolescents' developing self-esteem, hence the first part of our CLOAK, 'Challenge our Mindset'.
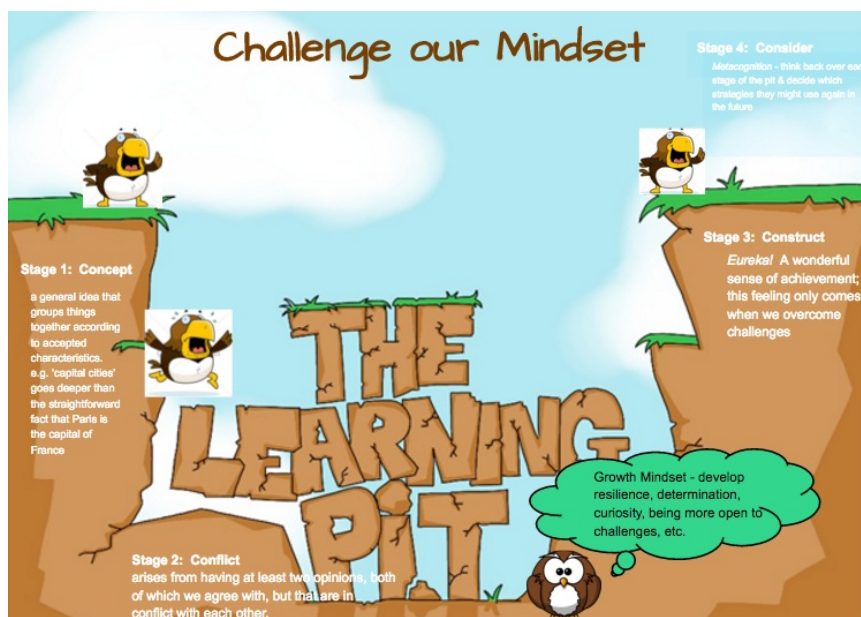
By using the shared language, 'in the pit' and the idea of the Learning Challenge we can help our learners develop resilience, determination, curiosity and being more willing to take on challenges. We want our learners to

understand that learning is about making progress, not about being in the 'top group' or being better than someone. We also know that we get what we measure. If we only focus on the right answers, our students will learn that this is the most important thing. For some students wanting to be 'right' leads them take the easiest option and not challenge themselves. If we want our students to take risks, to challenge themselves, and really soar in their learning, we have to change this mindset by focusing (and celebrating) effort, determination, desire, and sustained concentration (Nottingham, 2010). Therefore, by praising our students for something over which they have control (effort, focus, determination, etc.) then we empower them to learn and to grow.

There is no elevator to success. You have to take the stairs.

Emerging adolescence is such an important time of growth and change. Designing our core principles around the recent research on adolescent brain development, learning, learner agency, hauora and mindset, we know we are in a position to be responsive to our learners' unique needs. All of us working at RJHS have chosen to work here because we like and understand this age group. We really can't wait to start our learning journey together.

The last few weeks have been exciting, inspiring and empowering, as we've welcomed our new staff. Day by day, we've 'deschooled', we've 'unbundled schooling' (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012) and challenged the traditional constructs of the 'paradigm of one' (Hood, 2015), silo'd subjects and assessment driven, content-laden curriculum delivery. We've co-constructed our vision for how schooling can look at our school, explored our principles and developed our values/dispositions, or our CLOAK.

Following the 'why' for change, we are now getting into the 'how' and the 'what'. We have spent time looking closely at our New Zealand Curriculum and discussing the essence of this powerful document. We even had a go at collaboratively planning our first unit for next year and wow! We all agreed that our planning was better, richer, more exciting and creative when we allowed for a 'collision of ideas' (Steven Johnson, 2010).

Our lens is focusing now on the logistics and the practice of teaching and learning in 2016, and how this will look at our school. We will have teams of three teachers planning and teaching integrated units. The units will be designed under meaningful, relevant theme, and they will be an authentic blend of two learning areas, where the natural links between two 'subjects' are emphasised to help our learners see real-life connections, thus enhancing learning.

This brings me to co-teaching. It's one thing to plan together and share ideas, but it's quite another to teach together. So what is co-teaching, and what is it not? Well, I can tell you it is not planning together and then going off to separate rooms and teaching each teacher's 'part' of the unit. It is not one person teaching while the other teacher goes off to do some marking or prepare resources. It is also not one person teaching while the other sits at the back and watches. And finally, co-teaching is not when one person (with the presumed authority) tells the others what will be taught and how.

As I was reading 'A Guide to Co-Teaching' (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2013) I was taken back to my time at Puketaha School (I know, I've referred to this before, but it really was such a determining, significant time in my career). When I arrived at Puketaha I was asked if I would co-teach with another teacher named Anne. Our brief was to do everything together. That was it. At that time, co-teaching was a completely new concept to me (and probably many others). I always enjoyed the starting up of my class, organising everything how I 'knew' would work. This whole co-teaching thing meant that I had to consult with/consider someone else in the equation. It meant I had to let go of some control. I had to compromise. I couldn't do things the way I'd always done them. And I couldn't do things 'my way'. I had to consult with another person before any decision was made. This was a challenge. It required a complete paradigm change, letting go of what I felt was very good practice (it'd worked for me in the past), and whole-heartedly trying this new way. It's kind of like a marriage, where we had to work together to meet a common goal. As I summarise what is co-teaching I will draw on my experiences from that time.

Co-teaching in our school will mean three teachers sharing the responsibility for teaching a group of 60 students. All tasks and responsibilities that used to be one person's job will now be distributed between three. The reason is that we believe that children benefit from three teachers with different strengths. Co-teaching requires trust,

effective communication and all three need to be committed to working through things to make it work. Looking back I can tell you that co-teaching is not a hierarchy where one person has more power or voice because of age or perceived authority. Each person on the team must be respected and their voice needs to be valued. If one tends to take over and dominate, this will stifle collaboration and team members will shut down, feeling disempowered. A system for sharing, communication and working together needs to be set up right from the start, so that there is an agreed-upon way of working together. This may feel 'formal' but it really is essential for healthy collaboration. You can't say, for example, that you will meet as a team every week for 20 minutes and then get busy and let this fizzle out. Problems and conflict will creep in with the breakdown in communication, trust me. All members need to be committed to, and honour, this time, and believe in the common goal.

According to Villa et al. (2013) there are four approaches to co-teaching:

Supportive Co-Teaching is when one teacher teaches and the other teacher(s) rotate around and provide support. When Anne and I first started our co-teaching journey together this was our approach. She might have been teaching a Social Sciences lesson on Aboriginal Art techniques and I would be rotating around the room, offering tips, help and possibly a one-on-one to a student who came late and needed a catch up. In this instance Anne was the expert, the authority, and I was the support person. If students had questions they would go to Anne. The benefit of this approach to co-teaching is that we could observe each other's practice and give feedback (which we got better at, and more honest about, as time went on and as trust was established).

Parallel Co-Teaching is when two or more people work with the different groups of students around the space. This was how Anne and I taught our Maths/Numeracy groups. This allowed us to differentiate for different personalities, learning needs and levels. We met together at the end of every day (yes...every day!) and planned together. This was the best time. I know it sounds full on, but I think in those daily meetings where we talked about the kids' progress (moderated), discussed problems or things that weren't working for us, and changed kids who needed to be in a higher or lower group (fluid grouping), I think in the long run we saved a great deal of time, and the learning was enhanced. The other benefit of us meeting each day was we both felt that we really knew our learners (we had 50+ students at any time). We could discuss students who weren't progressing. And as Hattie (2012) says 'When students do not learn, they do not need more, they need different'. The other benefit of these daily catch ups was the comradery, the feeling that we were in this together, and supporting each other. So often in my past teacher I would shoulder the weight of all the day's problems on my own. Anne and I often talked about how much we appreciated each other's support, encouragement and feedback.

Complementary Co-Teaching is when teachers work together to enhance the message or the delivery of the lesson. It could involve one teacher explaining while the other teacher models at the same time. Or it could involve pre-teaching some skills that will be needed for the learning. For example when teaching an integrated Nutrition (Health) and Food Technology unit, one of us might have taught the small-group social skill roles required for successful cooperative group work, then launched into our 'designing healthy lunch box muesli' bars learning. Anne and I taught many lessons where we were both at the front of the class delivering the teaching together. This was lots of fun and I think the kids enjoyed it and found it more engaging than the same person always talking. However, we still divvied up the responsibilities. (Note we had a lot of student voice and ownership of learning, but right now I'm focusing my lens on the teaching.)

Team Co-Teaching is when two or more teachers plan, teach, assess and assume responsibility for all the students in the classroom (Villa et al. 2013). Each teacher equally shares the leadership and responsibilities, dividing the lessons in ways that allow the kids to benefit from each teacher's areas of expertise. For example, one of the units Anne and I taught was called 'Ready, Set, Shoot' where I focused on how the eye works, how we see, light, colour, and how a pinhole camera works (which we actually constructed and used). Concurrently, Anne picked up on any relevant concepts that could be applied to her focus on photography where she explored colour, composition, negative space, lighting, and then on to developing a story-board of photos which each student presented to our class and families. It was amazing. I learned so much from Anne around photography and she learned more about Science from me. The key was that we were simultaneously delivering the lessons and highlighting the authentic connections between the two areas. We also learned other more subtle things, such as each other's questioning techniques, or behaviour management techniques. It all added to our own kete of 'what works'. The kids benefited from our different areas of expertise, our personalities and our different styles. Our

skills and knowledge were complementary and led to a much richer learning experience for all.

Each approach explained above has its place. As we get to know and trust each other, predominantly team co-teaching can be our goal.

According to Villa et al. (2013) there are five elements of co-teaching:

1. **Common, Agreed-On Goals** - it is essential to plan the unit together and agree what the learning goals will be. By combining each teacher's unique talents, expertise and experience, the teaching and learning is enhanced.

2. **Shared Belief System** - teachers have to 'buy in' to the power of collaboration, and truly be open to learning from each other. We also need to have a shared language to discuss teaching and learning.

3. **Parity** - I can not emphasise this enough. When teachers come together there will be inevitable differences in age, experience, and expertise. It is essential that co-teachers perceive that their contributions are valued and that they are respected members of the team. Co-teachers need to feel safe to offer ideas and concerns. Asking each other for their ideas, opinions, and being sensitive to the suggestions offered by others will foster a culture of sharing, regardless of perceived authority or status. Ultimately, each member needs to give and take direction.

4. **Distributed Functions Theory of Leadership** - in essence, no one on the team is in charge. Co-teachers must agree to redistribute their classroom leadership and decision-making responsibilities among the team members.

5. **Cooperative Process** - there are five facets to this process:

- *Face-to-Face Interactions* - remember how I said Anne and I met at the end of each day? This really was essential. Co-teachers need to decide when and how often they will meet, and pre-determine how long they will meet. They also need to develop a system for communicating information. I've seen times when this hasn't been established from the start - communication breaks down and conflict can result.

- *Positive Interdependence* - this is the heart of co-teaching. In essence, it is the belief that no one person can completely respond to all the diverse needs of the heterogeneous groups of students in our classrooms.   By pooling the diverse skills, knowledge and expertise of our collaborative teams, we can better meet the needs of our learners.

- *Interpersonal Skills* - this includes the verbal *and* the nonverbal components of trust, how we manage conflict, how we problem solve, and all of our social interactions. Members of the collaborative team will have varied interpersonal skills, depending on prior experience, training, personality and communication preferences. Effective co-teaching members will encourage each other and give feedback to improve.

- *Monitoring Co-Teacher Progress* - according to Hattie (2012) "The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the greatest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers". One of the benefits of co-teaching is enhancing teacher capacity. Co-teachers can check in with each other and talk about how the learning is going, whether the students are achieving learning goals, and if they aren't then make decisions about what adjustments need to be made, and discuss how things are going in general. As trust builds, teachers can give each other feedback on successes and also make suggestions on areas to improve.

- *Individual Accountability* - for co-teaching to be effective it relies on the collective delivery of skills and knowledge by each individual, as well as each co-teacher fulfilling their end of the bargain, i.e. completing the agreed-upon tasks such as preparing differentiated materials, meeting deadlines, attending meetings, and contributing to planning/moderation discussions.

I often make reference to my time at Puketaha and co-teaching with Anne. When I think back now I wonder how did we make it work? We had no professional learning development and no external support; we were literally 'thrown in' to this 'forced marriage' and told to make it work. When it got hard in the early stages (as second order change often is) it would have been far easier to default back to our old practice, what we knew, what gave us confidence, and what was easy for us. Instead we just did it. We were determined to make it work, we had a

common goal, we were in it together. Not to mention, as time went on we developed such trust in each other. I knew Anne had my back and I had hers. There was a real loyalty. I knew if I messed up (as we all do when taking risks) she wouldn't be telling someone about it at the water cooler. Also, I just had a profound respect for Anne and I think she did for me; we could see that each had skills and experience that could help the other. I think the kids could see this too, and I think they enjoyed the dynamic energy of having two professionals in the room, adding in our expertise, building relationships with the kids, and telling our anecdotal stories to keep things engaging, real, and interesting. And, we had fun! We really did. My time co-teaching with Anne was my most rewarding yet. When I left Puketaha and went on to teach single-cell again, something was missing for me...that sparking ideas off of each other, the professional reflection, the feedback, the collective problem-solving, the shared celebration of a great lesson or when one of our learners had a break-through with something they had been struggling with. So, while I know that co-teaching will be a new challenge for some, I also know that co-teaching is so much more rewarding and effective then teaching alone. And I can't wait to get started.

> If you want to go fast, go alone.
> If you want to go far, go together.
> *African Proverb*

Starting a new school means creating everything from the ground up...there is a vacuum that needs to be filled with systems, structures, curriculum, timetables, and so on. This is both an exciting opportunity and a challenge. It certainly forces us to clarify our thinking about everything to do with teaching and learning, because decisions need to be made.

So what rules will we have? We've all come from schools where there have been a range of rules...no cell phones, no nail polish, only regulation hair tie colour, no jewellery, no climbing trees, no skate boards or scooters past the gates, no running, no talking, no hair down, no long hair, no hair colour, no make up, no no no. There are other rules too...students must underline in red in one class, then underline in green in the next. A margin must be ruled for this teacher, but not for that one. I've seen schools where kids need to walk single file from one building to the next, with their hands linked behind their back, completely silent. Yet another school where kids are not allowed to clap at assembly (spontaneously) until the principal instructs them to do so. I've seen assemblies where kids have to sit with straight backs and arms folded for 50 minutes. Really?

My question is why? Why is there a rule that no nail polish is allowed at school? If this is a rule in your school, I'm not judging, I just need to know, how does nail polish affect learning? Why does nail polish matter? And why can't kids clap spontaneously when they feel like it? Why does hair colour matter? Why not climb trees? Why do we dictate which colour a child uses to write the date?

I understand we need some rules to keep everyone safe and for learning to take place. I'm just posing the question 'why?' to many of the rules we have traditionally had, and possibly under an outdated model of schooling. Possibly the answer is that rules are part of life, that in the workplace it's not 'anything goes', that discipline is good for kids? I don't know, I'm just guessing really.

One thing I do know, and this goes for students and teachers, is that as soon as you start micro-managing people with rules, they stop thinking for themselves. They become compliant or they take their genius somewhere else. Enforced mediocracy eliminates all of the colour, and we are left with grey.

Of course structure is needed - this gives people a sense of security, but let there be freedom and flexibility within the structure to be, to grow, to take risks, to fail, and possibly to soar.

I have noticed that when there is a problem in the play ground, and if it becomes a bother, an inconvenience for busy teachers, there can be a knee-jerk reaction to create more rules. Yes, this will make things easier in the short term, but what a wasted opportunity. I know in many schools, for example, there have been kids fighting over the collectable supermarket cards and toys. I understand the appeal of banning them, but isn't that a great

learning opportunity for our kids? Will there be elevated emotions? Probably. Will there be frustration, tears? Possibly. But isn't this a chance to develop our New Zealand Curriculum key competencies...getting along with others, problem solving, conflict resolution, compromising, negotiating, sharing, caring, showing respect for others, communicating effectively, etc. In Barry Schwartz's TED Talk '*Our Loss of Wisdom'* he emphasises this: 'What happens when we turn increasingly to rules...moral skill is chipped away by an over-reliance on rules that deprives us of the opportunity to improvise and learn.'

Rules are needed but they are like the surface features of a piece of writing... Necessary for things to read smoothly but if that's our priority focus then we can quickly lose the emphasis on the message of the writing, the deeper features. I think too many silly (pointless?) rules can act as a distraction from our core business, and that is learning. For me, I want to be talking to kids about their research, their wonderings, their current challenges, not about having the wrong hair tie colour.

I think 'choose your battles'.. I will 'go to battle' about treating people with respect, kindness, work ethic, commitment, accountability, ethics, etc. I want my conversations with kids to be relationship-building, not relationship-eroding. I couldn't give a toss what colour hair they have. It really makes no difference to how I feel about them as a person. Try starting each day with a reprimand about uniform misdemeanours (as many of us recounted about how we had to do this in our past life) and see how quickly the school culture becomes about compliance rather than about learning.

I've always got a kick out of self-managing or toi mana whakahaere; don't get me wrong, I'm all for kids developing self-managing, but what tickles me is the various (mis) perceptions of what self-management means. Self-managing is not about sitting up straight, being quiet, being compliant. Self-managing is about our kids actively thinking for themselves, making decisions, and dealing with the consequences. It's about 'managing self'. Sadly many of our students learn to 'play the game' and as Hattie (2012) describes it, they learn to be '...physically present, passively engaged, but psychologically absent.' That is (in my opinion) tragic. But if we are so controlling with our rules, when do kids ever get the chance to make decisions or learn how to manage themselves?

The rules I want are, of course, are those that mirror the rules needed to be a positive, contributing member of society. The rules I want in school are about keeping kids safe and about learning. When I'm asked 'Do we have to wear hair back?' I would like to respond with 'Is it interfering with your learning?' If it is because you are playing a sport or you are working with food, then yes, put your hair back. Let's bring back the common sense and the opportunity for kids to think for themselves.

If you want to take it even further, watch the televised No Rules School about Swanson School, a school in South Auckland that has eliminated all rules at play time. Principal Bruce McLaughlin talks about helicopter parenting, how wrapping kids in cotton wool is taking away a lot of learning opportunities for kids. The school has introduced risky, unmanaged play because risk is good for young brain development; the prefrontal cortex bit of the brain that manages risk and controls emotion develops when you expose it to risk and emotions; the argument is that kids need this stimulus to develop, and it is better to allow for managed risk now at 8 up a tree rather than at 18 in a bar. Some may find this too extreme, and I agree I too feel a bit nervous about the risk, but there is something to letting kids work stuff out for themselves. There is also something to minimising control and letting kids just get on with it and play!

Last week we visited Matapihi Kindergarten in Te Mata...hands down the highlight of my week. While I was struck by the emphasis on beauty, the abundance of natural and recycled materials, and all the available items for self-initiated play. There was an abundance of active play and exploration of their natural environment. It was so cool! But,what I really noticed was the absence of teacher intervention. Although we didn't discuss 'the rules' at Matapihi, it was obvious that these children were given the opportunity to sort stuff out for themselves, and ask for help when they needed it. They were allowed to be faced with challenges (inclement weather, risky games, asking for help, negotiating game rules and problem solving) and deal with the outcome. We smiled as we watched two boys negotiate their way down a muddy hill on a recycled skate board (wheels removed), falling, laughing, tumbling their way down, deciding it was too dangerous, and modifying their game accordingly. No teachers intervened. No one said 'no'. No one said 'don't get dirty' or 'don't do that', 'you'll get hurt'. It was seriously cool. I

just felt like an environment that promotes the peaceful expression of each little learner as a developing individual. It felt like their uniqueness, their specialness, was being honoured, celebrated. It felt like not everyone conforming to same-same. How refreshing. And guess what? Every child was engaged. Every child was learning. Every child had their needs met. Every child was being challenged. Every child was happy.

So what about us? What will we do? What rules will we have in our school? In our school we will be guided by our vision (to empower our people to be connected, collaborative, community-minded learners, inspired to soar) and our CLOAK (the attributes and character that we want to help our learners to develop as learners, as friends, as members of society). As teachers, we are models of character every minute of the day, we are teaching, always. With regard to our actual rules, nothing is written in stone as yet, but I believe we will opt for 'less is more', and to always ask 'why?'. If there is a need for a rule to keep kids safe or ensure that they are able to learn, then sure, let's make it a rule. But let's not make nonsense rules that have no purpose and just create animosity between teachers and students. We know that relationships are key, so let's put our energy and thinking into what really matters, connecting with our students and creating inspiring learning opportunities.

We've started this conversation about rules but I think it's more than just rules, it's the whole system and why we do what we've always done. I'm simply asking educators to ask why?

I've just been reading Cheryl Doig's 'Collaboration in Schools' Think Beyond blog, and her 'Nested Layers of Collaboration' description has certainly resonated with me. In this process of designing a new school and co-constructing our curriculum and pedagogy, we have a common belief in the importance of collaboration as a way to lead to better outcomes.

As we are building our school team, we've talked a lot about collaboration. What is it? And why is it so imperative in an increasingly complex world? We've come to realise that teachers have varying conceptions of collaboration, and rather than a 'collision of ideas' (Steven Johnson, Where Good Ideas Come From) some view collaboration more as a 'division of labour'. I prefer the 'collision of ideas' concept as I know from experience that my most rewarding teaching (and learning) was when I truly collaborated with other teachers to create something much richer, more authentic and engaging than I could have created on my own.

Cheryl describes the nested layers of collaboration: Day to Day Collaboration (referring to those we collaborate with most frequently), Organisational Collaboration (where the collaboration intentionally supports the learning, connecting to the overall vision and values of the school), Associate Industry Collaboration (collaboration between schools and other places of learning) and Outer Collaboration ("looking out and bringing in").

All of these layers of collaboration are essential for the cross-pollination of ideas, and to be exposed to new thinking. We all agree that collaboration needs to begin with self-reflection, and being very clear about our own strengths and weaknesses. True collaboration will challenge us all. We can support each other through an implementation dip when we keep in mind what we have to gain in personal growth and enriched student learning.

The different layers of collaboration are essential to ensure that we do not become what my colleague calls 'echo chambers', where we are so insular and self-fulfilling in our thinking that our ideas never actually do collide with others' ideas. Some schools have a policy to do all professional learning 'in-house' to minimise the many competing interests of outside agencies. I look forward to collaborating within our school where we have a nest of specialists and outstanding practitioners, but I also look forward to 'looking out and bringing in', ensuring we have the opportunity to mingle with fresh ideas and link to the wider world.

So our task, as leaders of this new school, is to deliberately create a collaborative culture from day one. We have clearly indicated an expectation that all of our specialist teachers and generalist teachers will work collaboratively together. The specialist teachers need to maintain the integrity of their subject, while looking for natural connections between curriculum areas. The generalist teachers need to draw on their knowledge across all learning areas to make the connections explicit. By seeing other subjects through a different lens, we also know that we can grow capacity within our team and our students. Hattie (2015) concludes that one of the most powerful outcomes of collaboration is a shared conception of what challenge and progression looks like. For learners, we know that learning in authentic, connected contexts leads to engagement in learning and enduring

understanding.

As I see it, we need to value collaboration, expect it, and enable it. Teachers need time to collaborate and they need models of how to do it, how to share ideas, how to make decisions collaboratively, and how to teach collaboratively. Our approach will be deliberate. We also need to ensure sustainability as new staff and new learners come on board. We know that under pressure, people can default back to their comfort zone of didactic, silo'd teaching. By anticipating this we can support our teachers through their own implementation dip.

One thing is for sure, honest and open dialogue is essential. Ideas need to be voiced, welcomed, and respected. How do we do this while maintaining relationships, which are essential to positive working relationships? Setting up an agreed way of working together, and establishing how we are going to communicate, can ensure honest sharing of ideas whilst maintaining respectful relationships. In fact, Cheryl Doig would argue that if there is no conflict there is no true collaboration. If everyone is happy and agreeable, existing thinking is simply being perpetuated and there is no growth. Finding that balance between strong relationships and open, honest communication (collision of ideas) is the key.

We need to lead collaboration by modelling it. We need to be congruent between what we say we do and what we do. Chery Doig says 'Collaboration still requires people to lead. This is often through influence rather than position, but both are appropriate. In an increasingly complex world leaders must be able to navigate complexity, explore multiple perspectives and feel comfortable in not having all the answers.'

We are so lucky that our school is being designed as an open workspace. This de-privatised environment will enable collaboration. The technology (BYOD, GAFE, etc.) will further enhance the collaboration making the sharing, tweaking, and refining of ideas easier and involving everyone. It is also a way to work smarter. We understand though that working in an open plan ILE will be a challenge for some. Cheryl Doig distinguishes between vertical skills (in teaching this would be technical skills and subject expertise) and horizontal skills (people skills and being able to connect with a variety of personalities). We know that to thrive as a school we need to foster both skill sets.

So this brings us back to the question that we've been asking ourselves every step of this new school journey, and that is 'why?' Why collaboration? To leverage the collective wisdom of our school to foster better outcomes for our learners, to continue to grow and evolve in our thinking and pedagogy, and to meet the needs of all of our people (staff and students). This is the why.

The Concept of 'And'...

Throughout these early weeks we've had some inspiring conversations about the New Zealand Curriculum, loosely referring to the 'front half' (personal/dispositional curriculum) and the 'back half' (academic/content/skills curriculum) of the curriculum. We all feel strongly that the development of key competencies, values, principles (our CLOAK) really is key, and the driver of learning and development at our school.

It has occurred to me when discussing teaching and learning it is easy to fall into an 'OR' mentality, what Mark Osborne phrased 'false dichotomies'...teacher directed vs student directed, concepts vs dispositions, integrated curriculum vs specialist subjects, standardized tests vs personalised assessments, breadth vs depth, etc. and we realise that it shouldn't be 'or', it can be and should be 'and'.

When learners come to us in February 2016 they will bring their own kete of skills and knowledge. They will be on a continuum of capabilities and we will need to respond to where they are on this continuum. It would be naive to think that all students will be, or should be, self directed all the time. All learners will benefit from varying degrees of self direction and teacher direction/coaching/guiding/teaching. As Dennis Littky says '...treating everyone alike differently.' There is benefit to combinations of formal lectures, conferencing, group work, research and inquiry, and individual study (Thomson, 2009).

As well, it is essential that we plan for, and teach, the development of the front half AND the back half of the curriculum. We need to develop their skills and ways of thinking that will promote success and build their desire to learn more (Littky, 2004). We need to ensure the personal, dispositional curriculum is as visible and valued as the

academic curriculum. Our challenge will be to ensure that the dispositional learning and progress is 'trackable', with direct acts of teaching, coaching and feedback of these skills. We want our CLOAK to be prominent, an organic part of why we do what we do, how we do it, the culture we create, the language of learning that we use. Of course we need to track learning, progress, curriculum coverage. We already have this visibility in the academic curriculum (National Standards, NCEA, Standardised Tests, etc.) so our goal is not one or the other, but one AND the other.

Our emerging timetable design is reflective of the 'AND' paradigm. We have Learning Advisories placed daily and prominently in our timetable to ensure that we have time with our small groups to develop the key competencies and personal curriculum. We have Curriculum Modules to allow for authentic learning contexts and meaningful, real-world connections between learning areas. We have purposefully designed the Modules to be 100 minutes to ensure that topics can provide breadth (opportunities to be exposed to a range of contexts) and to be studied in depth, messy problems can be grappled with, project work can be carried out, and flexibility can be incorporated to teaching and learning.   Finally, we have timetabled Flight Time to allow for really zoning in on a particular area of need (learning support, GATE, languages, passions, etc.) which will incorporate an element of learner choice and enable differentiation.

The paradigm of 'AND' will ensure we are balanced and that we are responsive to our learners, that is, personalised.

I am struggling. (This is ok, expected, a good thing...) We are doing lots of thinking about how to design our timetable, and of course this will depend on our curriculum design. We want to enable and encourage Innovative Learning. How do we do this? How do we ensure flexibility, allow for individualised learning pathways, track learning, and ensure progression/coverage? How do we work within logistical constraints (large numbers of learners, staff, timetables, science labs, food technology spaces, teacher release time, availability of experts, physical layout of school, etc.). How do we plan for deep, enduring, progressive, authentic learning which is responsive to the learners' needs and interests? How do we measure our effectiveness? How do we track it? I'm confident we can do this, but how do we plan for it?

What is a curriculum?
Broadly defined it is the totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process.

How do we design a curriculum? In my past experience this would have included:

- two year overview of big ideas, units, subjects, strands

- a mixture of subjects, integrated units, inquiry units, projects, etc.

- clear benchmarks for each year level (i.e. national standards)

- a beginning and an end (clear destination aka National Standards, Curriculum Levels, etc.)

- assessment linked and purposeful (John Hattie talks about being 'aligned with assessment system')

- clear planning to ensure coverage

- involved a handbook - a Planning and Assessment guide for staff which we designed each year

- over time responded to student needs, gaps in coverage, current/local/community events

My question now is...how do we design a curriculum to ensure 1 year input - 1 year progress (Hattie, 2015)? How do we design and plan a curriculum which is open enough, yet structured enough, to…

- be inspired by students' interests - personalised learning (students we haven't met yet, and lots of them)

- respond to students' needs - differentiated

- ensure curriculum coverage (knowledge still matters Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012)

- is problem-based, integrated, authentic, rich

- know where we are starting, exactly where we are going, and many choices as to how to get there (UDL, Backward by Design Jay McTighe)
- is developing those key learner attributes (resilience, commitment, hard work, perseverance, practice, etc.)
- is developing and growing those skills that employers are looking for (problem solving, team working, communication, critical thinking, creativity, leadership, literacy, digital literacy, numeracy, etc.)

John Hattie says 'At the centre of any curriculum are the expectations of what is to be learned at various milestones.' So clearly, we need a plan. Therefore, we need to be making decisions about what is to be learned, and when.

For a long time I've talked about 'structured flexibility'...that is being prepared with a structure, a plan, a destination that is clear and purposeful. Then, being completely flexible within this plan (reminds me of UDL) in that even though there is a clear destination, how each learner gets to that destination can be completely personalised and flexible.

I guess part of the tension for me is, if we had much smaller numbers arriving, we could tinker a bit, be a bit more 'emerging', truly go with the flow. The number 800 is a reality. Plus over 40 staff. People like to be creative and innovative, but they also like to be this way with purpose and direction.

Hattie also makes the following points:

- Too many curricula are crowded, have low or poorly articulated expectations of progress
- The art of teaching is to balance the need for surface knowledge with deep processing of this knowledge. Deeper-thinking skills need content on which to work. You cannot use deeper-thinking skills unless you have something to think about.

Hattie talks about the teaching programmes privileging deep learning:

- inquiry-based learning
- individualised instruction
- matching teaching to styles of thinking
- problem-based learning
- whole-language learning
- student control over learning

He comments that the effect-sizes of these programmes are very low - and explains that it's not that they are not worthwhile programmes, but they too often are implemented in a way that does not develop surface understanding first. (p15) Therefore, we need to be mindful of finding that balance between content and skill, and progression of both.

Our job now is to ensure we maximise learning by designing a curriculum that is structured yet flexible, responsive and purposeful. We even need to approach our curriculum and timetable design flexibly, and make changes as we think we need to. We need to have a plan and then adapt as we go. As Schorr (1997) puts it: "Successful programs create an organizational culture that is...tight about their mission but loose about how the mission is carried out. Those responsible for these programs have no illusion that they can implement the perfect model program - at once or ever. They evolve in response to changing needs...and feedback from both front-line staff and participants...learning from their successes and failures and finding new and better ways to achieve their goals".

July 8, 2015

Why MLE, ILE?

The question has to be asked 'why?', why do we need change? This is a fair question, and one that has been asked by parents, educators, my own family...what is wrong with the current system? Some will say 'It worked for me'. In our online survey to parents and families, there were frequent questions around 'Why are the big open spaces better than small classrooms?', 'What about the noise level?', 'How will my child manage?', 'What about children who struggle with self managing or learning?', 'Will you have subjects?', 'Will my child be ready for NCEA?' These are all valid questions.

To begin with, what is a Modern Learning Environment (MLE), or an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE)? Many will by now be familiar with the physical components of a MLE, i.e. the big open spaces and the larger numbers of learners in these spaces. However, MLEs are so much more than big spaces, bean bags and ICT...the MLEs are open, visible, flexible, connected spaces which *enable* effective pedagogy, teaching and learning that is collaborative, flexible, authentic, personalised. This environment *enables* access to resources as needed, minimising barriers. It is an environment which *enables* teacher collaboration. The goal is for our new school to *enable,* encourage and support many different types of learning.

How is this different from current schooling? In The Rhetoric and The Reality, David Hood (2015) refers to 'the paradigm of one'...one teacher, teaching one class to one year level, using one curriculum in one classroom for one block of time. Most current schools were built between the 1950s and 1970s. 'Schooling' in its original form was actually designed for, and is a remnant of, the industrial age, where children were prepared to work in factories. Today's world is so different; we are living in a time of unprecedented change, with global problems and challenges that were unheard of 50 years ago. We have this wonderful opportunity to think about our future, our children's future, and create a 'custom-built' school which will truly prepare our children for *their* future.

Most of today's jobs require specialised knowledge and skills which are often learnt on the job and they are skills and knowledge which change often. There are, however, ubiquitous skills required in todays' jobs...being able to design and manage one's own work; communicate effectively and collaborate with others; research ideas; collect, synthesise, and analyse information, develop new products; and apply many bodies of knowledge to problems that arise. Fifty years ago the ticket to securing a job was content mastery of a handful of high school subjects. Today, this system is obsolete. As David Hood (2015) explains:

> *There is one certainty in this world of uncertainty. In 15-30 years our young people will be in charge. Our role as educators is to prepare them for their futures, not our present. We need to prepare students for jobs that do not yet exist, to use technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet. (p. 24)*

To put this unprecedented change into perspective, the top 10 jobs projected for 2015 did not exist in 2005. As Bolstad and Gilbert (2012) explain, '...schooling needs to be "unbundled". It '...has to be about doing 'better things' rather than doing things better.' (Hood, 2015).

In designing our new school our goal is to design a curriculum to ensure learning that has use and relevance to our learner's futures. Imagine a curriculum and an environment that:

- Is designed with learners at the centre; a completely personalised learning pathway, with learners able to progress at their own pace. We will allow for flexible learning pathways. Instead of making the learner fit the environment, we are making the environment and programme fit the learner (Universal Design for Learning webinar from VLN, 2015).
- Will allow for future-focused, 21st Century learning.

- Ensures that each learner will be part of a smaller group with a teacher who will act as a personal coach. The coach will know their learners well, and they will meet regularly to monitor learning goals, and to support students with school life. They have time to reflect and set new goals. They have time to *think about*, and *talk about*, learning. Learners will have time each week to record this reflection and goal setting in their learning narrative. This *ownership* of the learning process is powerful. This close relationship ensures that students' trajectories will be closely monitored and tracked.

- Has a timetable can be flexible to allow for different types of learning: teacher-led workshops, individual work, collaborative student project work, research...with some activities that are compulsory and some that are based on student choice.

- Has a learning programme that is directly aligned with individual student learning goals; when students have choice in their learning programmes, and when their learning is aligned with their goals, they will be more motivated and engaged.

- Ensures that student learning and ability will be measured by the quality of their work rather than through excessive testing. Students can demonstrate their learning through meaningful, rich tasks such as inquiry problem based learning projects or community partnership projects.

- Ensures that students will have regular opportunity to follow their passions and to develop their interests.

- Is warm and demanding to foster personal development and academic development.

- Values and promotes key competency development.

- Allows for collaboration between teachers so that 'subjects' are no longer silo'd; instead rich connected, authentic learning across learning areas to more closely represent real life, authentic contexts.

- Takes place in contexts that deal with 'messy problems' that are more relevant to current and future societies; addiction, loss of face-to-face interaction, 'bullying', climate change, environmental pollution, deforestation, species being killed off, natural resources being depleted, new technologies are allowing the extraction of new sources of oil but at high economic as well as environmental cost, toxins such as pesticides polluting the environment (impacting on animal life and on humankind), antibiotic-resistant 'super-bugs' (Hood, 2015).

- A curriculum catering for a range of learning needs, special needs, needs for extension or enrichment.

- Learners who are self-aware, where learning is visible, and learning talk that is commonplace; developing a growth mindset and an understanding that it is ok to be in 'the pit'. We will help each learner develop a tool kit for getting out of the pit, through a well articulated learning process. As one learner from Stonefields School explained 'If you're on a smooth road, you're not learning, it is not challenging enough, or you haven't asked the right questions.' We want our learners to value the pit.

Recognition of the need for change, is one thing. To have the moral purpose and courage to make this change is another.

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