

FIVE LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORKS

Jean Annan, PhD
Woolf Fisher Research Centre Affiliate
University of Auckland

INTRODUCTION

This introduction comprises descriptions of the activity of five Learning and Change Networks. The networking activity of the five groups of schools has been documented to:

- Foster networks' reflection on their Learning and Change process
- Describe the ways in which networks have formed
- Demonstrate the diverse ways that networks have approached understanding current and future learning environments
- Share with other networks any discoveries and insights to date.

The description in this documentary of a diverse set of networks at work illustrates that a range of achievement challenges are being pursued and that the methods used to explore and understand learning environments are various. However, each network has a common interest in enhancing the learning environments and the academic achievement of students with priority learning needs.

The documents contain detailed information about the establishment of the networks and the exploration of the current learning environment. Clearly space had not allowed for every action to be reported and in many cases, representative examples are used. Where possible, indications are given of the direction the networks' plans are taking although most networks are, at the time of writing, just reaching this point in their Learning and Change processes. The documented network activity will be made available on the Learning and Change Network Strategy (LCN) website and will be updated as change priorities are

identified and programmes developed. The intention is that the document will have multiple audiences. These audiences include:

- The participants in each of the five Learning and Change networks
- Participants in other Learning and Change networks
- The Ministry of Education
- The wider education sector.

THE LEARNING AND CHANGE STRATEGY IN FIVE NETWORKS

The activities and observations of the following Learning and Change networks are reported in this document.

- Auckland Intermediate Schools Learning and Change Network, Northern Region
- Manaiakalani Cluster, Northern Region
- Naenae Schools Learning and Change Network, Central South Region
- Te Puke Schools Learning and Change Network, Central North Region
- Van Asch Deaf Education Centre Learning and Change Network, Southern Region.

The five networks contributing to this document were chosen to illustrate networking in a range of different contexts. Not all networks entered the Learning and Change Strategy at the same point. For example, the Manaiakalani cluster, had already started the networking process at the time the Learning and Change Strategy was initiated. van Asch Network and Auckland Intermediate Schools Network were underway in pilot networks for the Strategy in mid-2012, before the official start. The Learning and Change networks in Naenae and Te Puke joined the Strategy at the point at which it was introduced through the country in February 2013. As a group, the five networks represent rural, suburban and multi-region New Zealand networks and include primary, secondary and special education schools. Working in a diverse range of geographical, social, and cultural environments, each network has pursued the Learning and Change Strategy in different ways. The networks are briefly introduced below.

Manaiakalani, established as a cluster (the group of schools prefer to use the term 'cluster') in 2010, has already completed a cycle of learning and change and have created an innovative learning environment for the students in their area. The cluster's story illustrates the integration of the key components of the Learning and Change Strategy; Applicable educational provision for students who have not achieved national standards, integration of cultural perspectives in programmes of teaching and learning, and a blended learning environment in which students can access information as and when required. The students in the cluster have an environment that allows them to learn 'anywhere, any place, or at any pace'.

van Asch Deaf Education Centre, one of two Sensory Networks engaging in the Learning and Change Strategy, are focusing on student engagement. The network is gathering information from students, families and teachers from regions throughout the country, extending from the middle of the North Island to the bottom of the South Island. *van Asch Deaf Education Centre Network* is exploring the circumstances in which students are able and choose to engage in learning activities.

Auckland Intermediate Schools Network, initiated early in 2012 as a pilot network, is focusing on their students' writing after noting discrepancies between students' scores in writing and those obtained in other areas. The network has recently analysed the information collected to understand the context of the students' writing in their schools and has developed plans.

The new networks in *Naenae* and *Te Puke* are currently working through the 'Learning what to Change' phase. The *Naenae* network has focused their collection of information on the influences on children's academic achievement, with different schools taking selected academic areas. Having analysed their information, they are placing major emphasis on student agency in learning and the schools' authentic connections with the local community. Similarly, the *Te Puke Network* is focusing on student achievement. The early findings of the *Te Puke network* have highlighted the value of community engagement and

network leaders are exploring this area in depth to ensure that they create an environment in which the students, parents and schools can take an active role.

METHOD FOR CONSTRUCTING DOCUMENTS FOR EACH NETWORK

The development of the five documentaries in this report was based on observations and discussions with network leaders, facilitators and Lead Development Advisors. The accounts of each network consider the formation of the groups, the development of processes for understanding students' learning environments and, where possible, document the activity associated with planning. The Learning and Change Strategy involves networks of schools learning what to change, planning to make change and changing practices to create innovative and effective learning environments with and for students. Most of the networks whose activity features in this report are reaching the end of the 'Learning what to change' phase, originally termed 'understanding' phase. They are in or close to the stage in which they plan their new programmes of change in their networks and schools.

As noted earlier, the information for the documentaries was collected through conversations with network leaders, attendance at meetings and observations. The writer did not gather directly any information from students. Permission to include comments, drawings or photographs of students has been gained by the schools. Facilitators and network leaders were asked to make additions, deletions, and modifications to the draft documents to ensure that the final drafts represented their view of the network's activity.

It must be noted that the information in this report is not an evaluation of actions taken by the networks nor does it represent research findings of the Woolf Fisher Research Centre. Instead, the documentaries are descriptive and illustrative of network activity, based on events and interactions among participants of the network.

FIVE LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORKS

NETWORK 1: AUCKLAND INTERMEDIATE SCHOOLS LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORK

NETWORK 2: MANAIAKALANI CLUSTER

NETWORK 3: NAENAE SCHOOLS LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORK

NETWORK 4: TE PUKE SCHOOLS LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORK

NETWORK 5: VAN ASCH DEAF EDUCATION CENTRE LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORK

FORWARD TO THE FIVE LEARNING AND CHANGE NETWORKS

Within the following stories of five Learning and Change networks there are illustrations of new insights gained through thorough, systematic, contextually applicable and 'hunch-driven' data collection. During the course of the projects to date, the network leaders have been able to construct, within a broad situational analysis frame, processes for understanding the learning environments of the students in their schools. Network leaders have shared knowledge with colleagues and have taken advantage of the extended opportunities created to enter into professional dialogue with teachers, students and parents. Networks have also linked with other networks to learn and share their journeys, including both triumphs and struggles.

Although the networks are just nearing the end of the understanding phase, that is, learning about what to change and how to change it, new insights reported are substantial. Some new understandings involve fresh connections with ideas that have been previously known, but not with sufficient meaning to prompt action. An example of this is seen in the way network leaders, who have had numerous calls to collaborate with parents and community and to support their active participation, now report a deep sense of commitment to pursuing these principles. Genuine, active participation of parents and community in students' education is no longer just a good idea; it is an imperative.

The methods of exploring the current learning environments of the students participating in the project have led to the discovery of new interpretations, some which have challenged networks' original assumptions or hunches about influences on student learning. At times, conversations have generated more questions than they have answered. The more that networks learn, the greater their realisation that there is much more to learn. This is particularly the case where parents and community are involved, when network leaders consider their schools' cultural and linguistic responsiveness. For example, the Te Puke Learning and Change Network has identified that community and school connection is a key factor in students' engagement and learning. This is not a

new understanding; it is one about which the schools in the area have been mindful. However, through the insights gained in their exploration with students and the families that have engaged with the project to date, they are now acutely attuned to the more subtle influences operating. The Te Puke Network wishes to enhance community involvement. The leaders will gather new information in the coming months, being justifiably cautious about implementing a change strategy in this area until they have the depth of information required. They want to ensure that they make a positive difference. As is the case for many networks in the Learning and Change Strategy, change priorities may include a mix of new strategies and ongoing processes of community collaboration toward mutual understanding, respect and comfort in children's learning environments. It could be anticipated that much headway in building relationships, mutual understandings and agency in schools and community will take place amidst this dialogue.

Understanding the current and aspirational futures of students lies in the interaction among all parties influencing their beliefs, values, attitudes and knowledge related to learning (see Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Among the documentaries is an example of the way a cluster, Maniakalani, which has been operating for some time, has engaged with parents and community in the education of their students. The students, parents, community and teaching staff are all an integral part of the Maniakalani cluster, a group propelled through genuine collaboration and local and global connection. While clearly each network will have its own way of developing supportive relationships and shared understandings, the experience of the Maniakalani cluster reported in this document may help identify some of the questions that networks might ask in order to explore the opportunities for actively working together.

Engaging students in activities that position them for relevant learning has been of interest to each of the five networks. As the Naenae network has said, "We need to build on the WOW factor". Children engage best when they are excited by learning activities, when activities and interactions have relevance for their lives, past, present and future (see Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; Roland, 2012). All of

the networks have actively engaged students to identify what enthuses them and what they believe is relevant in their lives. van Asch Deaf Education Centre is exploring the contexts in which children who are deaf or hearing impaired are able to engage in learning and are examining participation in learning activities across multiple environments. Waikowhai Intermediate School in the Auckland Intermediate Schools Network discovered students' interest in cars and, after taking the students participating in the project to see cars racing, observed that the students produced substantially better writing than they had done before. Schools have always tried to find what interests students; what is different is now is the emphasis on depth of connection and relevance for students' lives. Students' interests and perceptions must contribute to new directions for their education rather than serving to inform detours along familiar, traditional journeys of schooling.

The schools involved in the five Learning and Change networks are preparing their students for a new world. As Dumont, Istance and Beavides (2010) have said, we face an "age of invention" and students will require a new set of skills and knowledge. Global change is rapid and here to stay. What is relevant today, may not be tomorrow. Fullan (2013) views that those graduates who are able to adapt and keep up with change will prosper and thrive in the new world. They will require particular skills and learner attributes including passion, purpose and ability to communicate effectively through multiple media. They will need to know how to share and create knowledge within an increasing number of local and global connections available through digital technologies and the increased movement of people around the world. Most importantly, they will need to be prepared to continually discover and create fresh solutions and build their niche in a newly structured environment.

Many New Zealand students will make this change naturally as they act on a world of opportunity in schools, homes and community. The Learning and Change Strategy is for those students who may not have optimal chances or who may require support to take advantage of new advances. Each of the five networks has placed students whose learning has been prioritised by the New

Zealand Government at the centre of their networks. They will draw on 21st Century pedagogy to help them build on the foundation of strength and capability they identify for each student, supporting them as they take their next step toward becoming fulfilled citizens of a new world.

References

- Dumont, H., Istance, D., & Beavides, F. (Eds.) (2010). *The nature of learning. Using Research to Inspire Practice*. Paris: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, *OECD Publishing*.
- Fullan, M. (2013). *Stratosphere: Integrating technology, pedagogy, and change knowledge*. Toronto, Canada: Pearson Canada.
- Gibbs, J. and Poskitt, J. (2010). *Student Engagement in the Middle Years of Schooling (Years 7-10): A Literature Review*. Report to the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital. Transforming teaching in every school*. Moorabbin, Victoria, Australia: Hawker Brownlow Education.
- Rowland, S. (2012). *The enquiring classroom. An approach to understanding children's learning*. Thame, Oxon: Imago Publishing.