Contents

Summary........................................................................................................................................3
Inquiry Team....................................................................................................................................3
Background......................................................................................................................................3
The inquiry........................................................................................................................................3
Key findings....................................................................................................................................4
Students.........................................................................................................................................4
Teachers.........................................................................................................................................5
School............................................................................................................................................5
Key implications.................................................................................................................................6
Plans for sharing the findings.............................................................................................................6
Reference List.....................................................................................................................................7
For further information.......................................................................................................................7

Project title:
Re-imagining Teaching and Learning in Year 9 and Year 10 at Alfriston College

Project reference:
Alfriston College (TLIF 1-121)

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Education Counts:
www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications.
Summary

The driving question for this inquiry was: if the Year 9 and 10 programme of learning is more tightly integrated across subjects, how will this impact on students’ learning, achievement and engagement? This inquiry is innovative because it enabled the teachers to free themselves from traditional curriculum thinking and devise new structures to investigate the potential of integrated learning.

Inquiry Team

Project Leaders: Melissa Watt and Karyn White. Karyn is the Senior Leader with responsibility for the junior school re-development (Years 9/10) and learning innovation.

The other members of the project team were Rachel Caine, Debbie Tupaea-Adams, Mohammed Gul and Sally Berridge. Rachel, Debbie, Mohammed and Sally were/are the junior school team leaders.

External advisor: Dr Rose Hipkins, New Zealand Centre for Educational Research (NZCER), supported the team’s reflection on their achievement of their inquiry goals at critical junctures and provided input into the emergent student assessment approach.

Background

It was the team’s vision that a locally developed curriculum would: explicitly teach students how to learn; build meaningful connections between learning areas (i.e. traditional subjects); promote transfer of skills between learning areas; and enable students to become more self-aware and self-regulating with regard to their learning and their futures.

The inquiry

In 2015, the team developed whānau-based integrated learning for the entire Year 9 cohort (5 whanau, 300 students, and 20 teachers). “Banding” was removed to prevent students and teachers from making assumptions about learning capabilities. In 2016, the Year 9 curriculum was further developed in response to findings in 2015 and a Year 10 curriculum was developed for the original cohort. Students were not assigned grades for their work; teachers provided detailed specific feedback and feed-forward.
A range of data collection tools and measures were used. Data that supported the school's vision, values and goals for redevelopment of the Year 9/10 programme were collected. The data included the usual school measures (asTTle, attendance, stand-downs and suspensions, and involvement in co-curricular activities). An evidential database was developed and maintained for 2015 and 2016 Year 9 cohorts. A process called Mediated Conversations was used initially to gather and process the experiences and insights of participating teachers. Later the same process was adapted as a student reflection tool, with thematic cards added to provide a conversational focus on important school ideas such as its Independent Learning Actions.

Data was analysed collectively, with Dr Rose Hipkins providing conversation and challenge at key points throughout the inquiry. Regular collaborative meaning-making of the data was a feature of the methodology.

**Key findings**

**Students**

- Student perspectives on learning, success and self-efficacy were challenged. “We have been shown that school can be something different.”
- Prior to the inquiry an average of 23% made two or more sub-level shifts in asTTle reading during Year 9. This increased to 51.9% in 2015 and 45.6% in 2016.
- Students learned to work collaboratively and productively to build and use new knowledge. During learning requiring collaboration, true ako was visible and articulated.
- Students value outcomes are public and, therefore, authentic. Public outcomes are a feature of cross-curricular projects.
- Students regularly write their own narrative learning stories (which are shared with home) focusing on knowledge that, knowledge how, and knowledge self. These have helped them see success more broadly than traditional knowledge acquisition.
Teachers

- Developed new understandings about learning and about the capabilities of their students.
- Developed their skills in using rich narrative assessment in the form of learning stories to capture and report progress.
- Were supported to develop capability in using new approaches to evidence-gathering (e.g. mediated conversations) before using these with students.
- Teacher pedagogy shifted from being the ‘guide on the side’ to being the ‘meddle in the middle’. Teachers have moved towards shared ownership; noticing, recognising and responding to learning opportunities; and to having one eye on the front and one eye on the back of the NZC.
- Teachers also learnt to work collaboratively in cross-curricular teams, in open learning spaces to achieve shared goals. (Previously the flexible walls had often been used to divide these spaces into single classrooms).
- The inquiry process went through several iterations as teachers trialled and adapted their practice in response to what they were learning.

School

- School structures (including whole school timetabling, leadership, meeting structures, prizes and awards) had to change several times to enable and support the new Year 9/10 programme. Without structural changes, an innovative curriculum will not be sustained beyond a small group of keen teachers and their students.
- Current staffing formulae do not adequately cater for collaborate team teaching. Extra staffing costs are being covered from the school’s operations grant.
- New data and new data collection methods are needed to adequately capture student progress.
- It took a second year to develop deep insights and strong learning outcomes.
Key implications

- Hallmarks of this project were:
  - This inquiry established a clear link between what the teachers planned to do and the intended outcomes for the Year 9/10 students.
  - Progress towards goals was tracked and measured throughout the inquiry. The assessment measures were relevant to the outcome measures.
  - Adaptive formative assessment measures were used to monitor engagement and learning.
  - Students were engaged in assessment of their own learning through narrative learning stories.
  - Parents had on-going access to the data on their child.
- There was a lesson learnt about the size of teams - if teaching teams are too big it is difficult to maintain focus and engage everyone.
- Some resistance is to be expected when change happens; therefore the unwavering support of the Principal is essential.

Plans for sharing the findings

In the last two years, the project team has hosted 15 school groups from within NZ and overseas. The project leadership team presented at the Learning at School conference in October 2016. A set article with Rose Hipkins is planned.
Reference List


For further information

If you would like to learn more about this project please contact the project leader at: k.white@alfristoncollege.school.nz
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