NEW ZEALAND

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Introduction

This system note focuses on New Zealand's *Learning and Change Network* strategy, which was initiated by a government budget appropriation in July 2011 to establish knowledge-sharing networks among kura, schools and communities to think creatively about ways to address the equity challenge. A learning and change network is defined as:

> *"A group of schools, kura[1] and communities working together to grow capability to accelerate learner achievement in a culturally intelligent way recognising the diversity of 21st century learning" (Ministry of Education, 2012).*

Just over 40 networks have already formed and the plan is to establish 60 networks by end of June 2013, involving up to one fifth of NZ schools and kura (500 of 2400) and associated communities. All learners are included in the networks, with a particular focus on our priority learners - Māori learners, Pasifika learners, learners from lower socio-economic groups, and learners with special education needs, and their families, teachers, school and community leaders.

1. Aims

The vision, aims and objectives for the *Learning and Change Network* strategy fit within the Ministry of Education's overall ambition to have a world leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century. To support the overall ambition, government has set targets for 85% of 18 year olds to achieve NCEA Level 2 qualification by 2016, and rising to 98% by 2021. In turn, those ambitious targets require accelerated achievement against National Standards[2] and Ngā Whanaketanga Rūmaki Māori[3] in primary and intermediate/middle schools

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[1] Kura Kaupapa Māori are Māori-language immersion schools (kura) where the philosophy and practice reflect Māori cultural values with the aim of revitalising Māori language, knowledge and culture.

[2] National Standards support national expectations of student progress and achievement across all areas of *The New Zealand Curriculum.* They are descriptions of what students should know and be able to do in reading, writing, and mathematics at different points of their schooling from years 1-8.

and kura so that, as a minimum, all year 8 learners are achieving the required standard of numeracy and literacy.

Government targets and educators continuing to do what has been done before will not address the equity challenge in New Zealand. There is a much higher chance of success if the people for whom those targets were set get excited about them and take personal responsibility to reach them. This is where the vision for the network strategy comes into play. The vision is about inviting priority student groups supported by their families, teachers and school and community leaders to take responsibility for learning and changing together in networks to achieve the overall lift. Underpinning this vision is a strong belief that the students and their supporting adults are inherently capable people. Looking at the equity challenge through that lens suggests that expertise resides within those groups to grow knowledge and skills together in order to explore common interests and to solve complex educational problems. This strategy, therefore, aims to create collective learning opportunities for those groups to find that expertise and use it to grow healthy and sustainable learning environments. The main mechanism for that capability and environmental growth is lateral networked learning and change within and across those groups.

The intention is to support primary and intermediate schools and kura, as well as secondary schools and wharekura along with their communities, to buy into the vision and understand their contribution. Supports are also in place to ensure the network participants continue to engage and progress when things become challenging. This is particularly important as learners make the transition between schools. It is well known that young people in New Zealand in years 8 and 9 are especially at risk of disengaging. It is likely that these learners would avoid this risk through collective learning and change in the transition from intermediate/middle/full primary to secondary school and kura. Engaging priority learner groups in challenging discussions about transition is far more likely to engage them in learning at this critical age than concerned adults sitting in staff rooms, Ministry offices and homes talking about them.

Specific objectives for the *Learning and Change Network* strategy are to;
- contribute to equitable outcomes for priority learner groups,
- build leadership capability to grow lateral learning and change capabilities within and between schools, families and communities,
- build sustainable links between schools, kura (the supply side of education) and students, families and communities (the demand side of education),
- grow evaluative capability around moderated use of achievement data and engagement indicators.

2. Leadership and Partners

There are three tiers of leadership and partnership arrangements within the Learning and Change Network strategy:
- One tier is a strategic partnership between the Ministry of Education, Auckland UniServices and The University of Auckland provider team. Those three organisations respectively provide national

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[3] Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori (National Standards for Māori-medium education settings) show the on-going progress of tamariki (children) in years 1-8 in te reo matatini (literacy) and pāngarau (mathematics) within Māori language immersion education.

management, contract co-ordination and provision of services in strategic policy, operational design and implementation design and facilitation support to network leaders.

- A second tier is an operational partnership between the Ministry's Lead Development Advisors, the provider team and the network leaders. Leadership in this tier is distributed widely as knowledge is grown and new practices and theories-of-action are formulated. Leaders of two established networks, namely Manaiakalani (a network of 10 schools and 1 kura in a low-socio economic urban community) and Kura-a-Iwi (a network of 26 kura in a range of urban and rural communities) are assisting to create a network-to-network learning arrangement. It is anticipated that the ministry and provider teams will step backwards over time and the broader networking arrangement will be vital to sustained development.

- A third tier is the priority students taking a lead role in developing lateral learning and change network arrangements among one another and with their teachers, families and school and community leaders. Without this tier, the strategy would be a talk feast.

Success relies on all three tiers operating as networks in their own right and becoming interrelated in design, implementation and evaluation. An important design feature is that every tier leads to the students both in terms of support to accelerate their learning and in terms of expectation that students will take their fair share of responsibility to achieve the desired lifts. Early signs indicate this feature is energising both the students and the adults.

3. Strategies and activities

Growing interest among network participants to learn and change is a fundamental implementation principle. Communities-of-practice literature (Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W., 2004) was used to inform strategy thinking around activating interest among students, teachers, leaders and families to learn and change. It is about communities of people growing knowledge around a common interest in order to improve their practices. That is precisely what network participants are invited to do. It is not about professional learning communities, a concept that emphasises learning and assumes change. It is about learning and change and that is what communities-of-practice do. The Ministry's advisors and provider facilitators will provide frameworks and criteria to get them started and references about where to find out more information, but the finding out and putting the detail into the frameworks and criteria is the activity of the network participants.

An overarching framework is four phases of development; (i) establishing infrastructure to operate as a network, (ii) profiling the current learning environment to understand student achievement challenges and agree on change priorities, (iii) implementing a plan to address the change priorities, and (iv) sustaining useful changes and agreeing on next steps. Network participants will not be spoon-fed with knowledge through those phases. They will set their change agendas, lead their strategies and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of their change activities. The Learning and Change Networks initiative is about growing the network participant's capacity to perform these functions.

Self-determination combined with open-source knowledge sharing across networks does not equate to a 'thousand flowers blooming.' To the contrary, there is considerable discipline and deep learning involved in the network activities. A design paper (Timperley and Earl, 2012), a report about global trends in lateral learning (Annan, 2012) informed a set of robust processes for use in network activity. Those processes

were recorded in an initial induction manual (Annan, 2012) and are now being transferred to be online resources. Three analysis tasks at the outset, for instance, engage participants for up to six months in deep learning to identify the priority achievement challenge, to map the current situation around the achievement challenge and to be clear about the learning, teaching, leadership and family support practices that are useful and should be kept and those that are best changed. Follow-on implementation and evaluation aspects of the design are equally challenging and, apart from minimal facilitation support, all the activities are supported within regular budget constraints. The network experience, therefore, breaks the mould of supply-driven hand-out strategies to demand-driven mind shifts and practice improvements.

Engagement with parents and families of young learners will happen early; it will provide opportunity for genuine co-construction of thinking about the best learning environment for their children and what needs to change to create such an environment. Learner voice and action coupled with parent and family voice and action will be at the forefront of all the network activities. An important design feature is that this input is both within and across schools and kura. In the past, across school activity has typically been for athletic field days, cultural festivals and speech contests. This strategy introduces the idea of fields days focused on growing healthy learning environments. Students and their mums and dads coming together across schools and kura to share their views about achievement trends, about teaching and learning, using data, engaging communities, addressing barriers, supporting transitions and prioritising resources. For too long, those topics have been discussed in staff rooms and ministry offices away from students and mums and dads. It is high time they were included in the conversations, not to be consulted, to be equals in taking responsibility about what to do next and to check for and celebrate success as it occurs.

4. Context

Over the last decade, New Zealand's education system has improved against a number of indicators. Overall our ambition is to have a world leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century. We know that whilst our education system has many strengths, too many learners are not achieving the necessary skills and qualifications they need for their future success. In particular, Māori learners, Pasifika learners, learners from low socio-economic groups and learners with special educational needs are disproportionately more likely to be underserved by the system. This is reflected in significant disparities in learner achievement, both within and across schools and kura.

New Zealand's education system, however, is only rated fair-to-good because of several significant challenges (Mourshed et al, 2010). A priority challenge is that three in ten students - and five in ten Māori students - leave school without achieving NCEA level 2, a minimum qualification for further education or employment. Overlay the strong influence of socio-economic factors on student learning and relatively static student achievement trends (PISA[4]) during a decade when investment in education continued to increase has created a sense of urgency in New Zealand to accelerate student achievement to achieve

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[4] The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, which looks at the achievement of 15 year olds in reading, mathematics and science.

equitable learner achievement outcomes. It is obvious there is plenty of development work ahead. In light of this work, the Ministry has set targets for the next five years[5] (Ministry of Education, 2012) and schools are expected to set annual targets and to report progress to their communities and to the Ministry.

There are early signs that many schools and kura as well as government and officials are shifting their thinking about how to meet those targets. In the past, the default solution was for individual schools and kura to meet the targets within the self-managing framework. Systems-support investment, such as Professional Learning and Development (PLD), were designed to support individual schools and kura. In the recent past, several ventures have been introduced to bring schools together, which suggests schools, kura and communities are coming around to the belief that complex educational problems are better solved in groups than alone.

An array of collaborative strategies came and went over the past decade; *Extending High Standards Across Schools* (EHSAS), *Schooling Improvement clusters* (SI), *Building Evaluative Capability in Schooling Improvement* (BECSI), *National Curriculum Learning Communities* (NCLC) and *Virtual Learning Communities* (VLC) for digital technologies. It was an experimental era and a great deal was learned along the way. Whilst there were a number of successes in those initiatives, there were too many cases where the structures and frameworks had not been rigorous or focussed enough and learning capabilities had not been embedded. There was also evidence that apart from a few standout examples, those programmes did not attend to equitable outcomes for priority learner groups. This limited the benefits and meant that they have not been sustained.

The Learning and Change Network strategy is an attempt to pull together useful findings from that experimental era that will bring together schools, kura, communities, professional providers and ministry officials to achieve government and school/kura targets for learner achievement. One point of difference from the previous experimental era, is the creation of sustainable partnerships and interdependence ahead of self-management and independence. A second point of difference is moulding together the three big agenda items of schooling improvement, blended learning and cultural responsiveness into a coherent whole instead of creating projects that deal with those agenda items in silos.

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[5] Ministry 5-Year targets are

- To increase the proportion of children starting school who have participated in early childhood education
- To increase the proportion of learners achieving expected literacy and numeracy standards
- 80% of schools will be demonstrating highly inclusive practice for learners with special education needs with 20% demonstrating good practice
- To increase the proportion of 18-year-olds with NCEA Level 2 or an equivalent qualification
- To increase the proportion of 25-to-34-year-olds with a qualification at level 4 or above on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework

5. Resources

The *Learning and Change Network* strategy was allocated NZD $7m over two years in the Government's 2011 Budget. This allocation is small compared to the investment that participant schools will contribute to the venture. It is also small alongside the other supports the Ministry provides but has the potential to reach a large number of learners. The following table shows how the allocation will be spent during the life of the initiative:

Design, implementation and support of the initiative	$1.5m
Internal staff providing support and monitoring to networks, including staff overheads	$1.6m
External provider and partner organisations providing support and facilitation to networks	$3.9m

This allocation will enable up to 60 networks (approximately 500 schools and kura) to be supported.

6. Development over Time

Design work on the Learning and Change Network strategy commenced within the Ministry in October 2011. To inform the design process and to satisfy early demand from some parts of the sector, five pilot learning and change networks were established. The pilot networks represented a total of 45 schools and kura. Those pilots and the Ministry's operational policy (Ministry of Education, 2012) benefited from The University of Auckland support to several other pilot networks in Australia and connections to the Global Education Leaders Programme (GELP) and the International Congress for Schooling Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI). Key point here is that reciprocal learning and design developments across international jurisdictions are an important development feature of the strategy.

The strategy formed formal partnerships and went live in October 2012 and the five pilot networks plus eight others were immediately transitioned from Ministry-supported infrastructure phase to facilitation support from The University of Auckland provider team for the understanding phase. In February 2013, a total of 24 networks have now been transitioned to the provider team to do the profiling and planning work in the understanding phase. The Ministry is currently supporting a further 17 networks through the infrastructure phase, which gives a total of 41 networks that will be engaged in detailed network activity by the end of April 2013. The 27 networks represent 164 schools and kura with a total roll of approximately 43,488 learners.

7. Evidence of effectiveness and efficiency

A significant indicator of effectiveness is the collection of achievement data that shows achievement challenges among priority learners have been addressed in an accelerated manner. Data tracking of that nature is primarily the responsibility of schools and kura within their regular planning and reporting cycles.

The University of Auckland provider team is also supporting networks to train practitioner-evaluators to lead evaluative probes. The probes aim to assess the extent to which networks are making the changes they prioritised and the impact of those changes on valued student outcomes. The Ministry is also monitoring network leadership via a capability continuum tool designed for that purpose. Efficiencies are being closely monitored via both the Ministry and UniServices Ltd on behalf of The University of Auckland.

Various satisfaction surveys are also tracking the extent of thinking and motivation of participant groups. In September 2012, for instance, pilot networks were surveyed and positive feedback showed participant thinking had been broadened and deepened beyond expectations, levels of motivation and enthusiasm and willingness to share transparently and honestly had increased with each session and student voice and responsibility was a main contributor to determining the networks' hunches and the possibilities they have grappled with. Importantly, the learners have been involved in all practice aspects of the methodology so far.

8. Success Factors

A primary success factors will be establishing networks that contribute to the acceleration of learning among priority student groups. That on its own will not resolve the equity challenge in New Zealand. A more significant success factor will be the extent to which systems-leaders as well as school leaders can align this strategy with other strategies that are also contributing to accelerated learning. Furthermore, success will also be contingent on those systems-leaders and school leaders removing strategies that are not making a significant contribution and that are causing clutter in the system. A consequential success factor, therefore, is for school leaders to create a more coherent practice environment and systems-leaders to create a more coherent policy environment and those two environments talking to one another about continuous improvement. At this point in time, both the policy and practice environments are cluttered with routine guidelines, rubrics, projects, programmes and accountability reporting, which are all vying for survival. This learning and change network strategy has the potential to reduce that clutter by shifting intervention logic from passive routines to active adaptations.

9. Tensions and impediments

Tensions and impediments are inevitable in any strategy and this one has its fair share. Some tensions are easily resolvable, such as suspicions among some schools that this strategy is simply another add-on to the existing suite of Ministry supports or national standards dressed up in new clothes. Others are not so easily resolved, such as organisations that espouse a desire to grow lateral learning and change then deal with everyday situations in a hierarchical manner. It is one thing to get excited about lateral learning and change, it is another thing to actually practice those things.

A priority impediment is the tendency to rush developments. Rushing the sign-up of networks and cutting corners in analysis tasks and across-school connections may satisfy contrived time deadlines or reduce

pressure on busy school leaders, but it does little to achieve the deep thinking, learning and change that is expected of this strategy. Quality time has to be dedicated to understanding what the strategy is all about and the level of commitment required to make sure it is successful. Time is also needed for careful analysis, decision-making about next steps and impact judgements among students and their families, teachers and school and community members. Cut corners on those things and this strategy is a repeat of past mistakes.

Pace and acceleration are not about rushing. They are about understanding, clarity of role in doing things and precision in planning, implementation and evaluation. They are also about avoiding time-wasting peripheral matters.

10. Sources

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