

A Spotlight on collaboration

Part 3 of 5

Sylvia Park School (SPS)



Collaboration at Sylvia Park School (SPS) Think Tank

The second spotlight covers Sylvia Park School's (SPS) experience of collaboration. SPS organised a Think Tank to explore learnings about hybrid and remote learning.

As you read this spotlight, consider how important thinking and reflecting together is in a complex undertaking such as hybrid learning, and in such a fast moving and ever-changing context. Multiple perspectives and even "out there" thinking become important to help us understand the far reaching impacts in such complex times.

Collaboration for deep thinking and change

Collaborating in this Think Tank together with diverse people with a wide variety of roles within the wider learning community - parents/whānau, teachers, support staff, MoE personnel – enabled the sharing of experiences and perspectives which helped a bigger and clearer picture of the learnings from lockdown to develop.

A safe space was created, and participants were invited to be fearless and radical in their thinking. Reflection on diverse experiences and perspectives opened up new ways of thinking and stretched participants to take account of the diverse experiences of others in their own thinking. Ako, reciprocal learning, was experienced with participants learning from each other.

In times of significant and complex change, one individual cannot hold the whole picture. We each need the perspectives and understandings of others to make our understandings more complete. Collaboration was essential to support us all to make the best decisions about how to move forward even though we might each do something quite different. The Think Tank provided such an opportunity and was relatively easy to organise.

Calling the session a Think Tank, moved it beyond being a mere talk fest and created an expectation that deep thinking would occur. It created a sense of purpose and expectation that this would move into the realm of action - that it would create change.

Think Tank & Teachers

On the 12th May (during level 3) we invited a small group of SPS teachers, support staff, Kāhui Ako teachers, a parent from another school and MoE to a Think Tank session at SPS. Our aim was to utilise the global experience of COVID-19 and it's potential to disrupt or implement change in the wider context of education. Sir Ken Robinson's 'Call to unite' provided the launching pad with his provocation "What type of normal do we want to get back to?"

The holistic approach to challenges that Design Thinking encourages, provided our participants the opportunity to be fearless and radical in their thinking. Using the experience of 5 weeks of teaching and learning in level 4 we asked the following questions:

How do people really learn? ... and why do you think they learn like that?

42 responses						
Whānau involvement, whānau/parent/teacher/child relationships, human connection and support	23%	'People learn through knowing they have support if they need it'.				
Self agency and reflection	10%	'Reflection: Did it work? Why/why not?'				
Setting the culture of care	20%	'Culture of care extends beyond learning'				
How learning is promoted	21%	'A focus on something you are passionate about'.				
How learning is enacted	26%	'Failure' and 'Real life learning'				

SPS Table 1



To finish we explored ideas around a recently circulated NZ Herald Opinion piece, School as we know it has gone; how can we rethink education? The effect of COVID-19 is seen as widening the gap between students already at a disadvantage — like those without internet and in transitional housing — and those able to study at home with ease. We questioned if it was a social divide. Or was it something else?

Discussion centered around the understanding that the teachers' positive learnings gained through lockdown were wanting to be implemented. Some of these were manageable inside their own classrooms however other ideas required leadership influence and direction. This led to the following questions being raised around Leadership roles within our system:

- » If we are pushing the reset button where will leadership come from?
- » Can principals be held accountable for the quality of service and care provided during lockdown?
- » How can we measure the moral purpose or agenda of those in Principal roles?
- » What lens is applied to Principal appraisals?

What will we do differently to create our 'new normal' when we return to school (beyond today)? 25 responses						
Flexible learning times	12%	'Could students choose what they do, when they do it? For the year 7/8 change starting time later. Start for deeper learning later, they could choose what they do in the morning.'				
Flexible environments	16%	'Use the outdoor classroom as a learning space for students.'				
Utilising expertise of staff/support staff/ whānau	4%	'How could we utilise the expertise of our teacher aides and whānau? E.g. Ercan as an artist, Tina teaching Tongan language.'				
Student choice/agency	20%	'Creating a youth advisory across the Kāhui Ako.' and 'Giving students a voice when they return.'				
Digital platforms/access/learning	20%	'Digital technologies (parents see the importance).'				
Building Kāhui Ako relationship	12%	'Year 8's working with students OTHC (in year 9). How could students work together? Students from year 9 with year 8 students. Peer mentors. Shared learning experiences.'				
Rethinking curriculum subjects/delivery	8%	'Having to rethink NCEA - looking at cross curricular links. Initial output is completely different.'				

SPS Table 2

The themed evidence in table 3 below continues the work of the Think Tank session. The first three questions were also posed to our entire SPS teaching staff and include the Think Tank data.

What worked really well? (BENEFITS)	%	What has been difficult? (BARRIERS)	%	What will we do differently to create our 'new normal' when we return to school? (BEYOND TODAY)	%
76 responses		42 responses		41 responses	
Collaborative planning	5	Lack of collaborative planning	2	More online opportunities	7
SPS Connect - (Co-constructed responsive pedagogical platform)	11	No access to internet Internet connectivity No access to devices Devices not working properly	29	More student choice Giving students a voice	32
Student Agency	18	Teachers missing physical classroom & relationships	2	Better utilisation of classroom devices	11
Established platforms (Google and Seesaw)	12	Parents lack of confidence Parents still working from home Parents needing more support	24	Continue SPS Connect (Co-constructed responsive pedagogical platform)	7
Whānau engagement / relationships / connection / Whānau as teachers	21	Students lack of confidence on platforms Disengaged students Students with devices but not using them Lack of prior exposure to platforms	24	Passion projects	7
Student led learning - passions	7	Lack of ESOL/ support staff input	7	Flexible Environments	24
Support staff engaged	3	Miscommunication via online	5	Flexible working times	7
Environment	8	Miscellaneous	7	Utilising expertise of staff/ support staff/ whānau	5
Students as teachers	5				
Feedback	7				
Miscellaneous	3				

SPS Table 3

Conclusion

Collaborating with diverse people helped us to make sense of our experiences and to extend our thinking. We were able to plan a positive way forward for our schools as a result.