

## Digital Normalisation

### Key Variables Evidenced in Pathfinders

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In researching a forthcoming publication on *Digital Normalisation and School Transformation* I interviewed some 70 odd leaders in the UK, US, NZ and Australia who were leading a school that had normalised or near normalised the whole school use of the digital or who had closely observed the uptake of digital technology in schools, from within tertiary education or in a consultancy role.

I was fortunate to analyse the workings of an extensive cross section of schools– primary and secondary – government, catholic and independent – urban and regional – small and large - above and below SES norm – in four quite different developed nations

What surprised was the remarkable commonality of the experiences – the developments – the trends – the issues – emerging from this set of schools – with schools at the digital normalisation evolution stage wherever they were in the world often having far more in common than schools down the road in the same education authority.

What also hit home was the years it had taken highly proactive schools to reach their current position, with most taking 15-20 years between the initial envisioning and today, and that in that time there had invariably been changes in the principal, on-going staff turnover and highs and lows in the schools' journeys.

Vitality it was also apparent that all had moved – largely unwittingly - thru common key stages and had had to experience that stage and develop their thinking and operations accordingly before being able to move to the next stage.

This is a concept very new to schooling that has major implications for later adopters.

Towards the final interviews – even when interviewing leadership teams in seemingly unique setting – the same points kept emerging

Some of the attributes are well documented over the decades in the organisational change literature.

Many have already been identified and examined in *The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools* (Lee and Winzenried, 2009), *Developing a Networked School Community* (Lee and Finger, 2010), *Bring Your Own Technology* (Lee and Levins, 2012) and *Collaboration in learning* (Lee and Ward, 2013).

Others – particularly those pertaining to the movement into the digital normalisation phase have emerged in the recent round of interviews.

All ultimately will be analysed in depth in the forthcoming publication on *Digital Normalisation and School Transformation*.

Near on 50 variables were identified. All are listed below.

Most are self-explanatory.

It is important to note

- the large number of key variables all the schools addressed and their relatedness.
- as the schools evolved the variables became ever more integrated and the school operations more complex
- each school shaped its own journey, usually without help from an education authority.
- the lessons provided in these variables for later adopter schools.

While the variables are closely related for ease of understanding they can be grouped in the following manner:

### **School Transformation**

- On-going evolution of the school's organisational form, attuning to meet ever- changing context.
- Natural growth and evolution flowing from adoption of digital operational base.
- Networked mindset. Strikingly apparent in all schools which had normalised. Commentator's observation re it missing in those who had yet to normalise – even when having sizeable proportion of staff using digital well. They were still insular in their thinking.
- Normalised whole school community acceptance of of-going evolution and change.
- Preparedness to question and vary traditional approaches to schooling
- Escalating growth in networked resourcing and use of school community capital

### **Educational philosophy encompassing all students' learning**

- Provision of apposite holistic and networked 24/7/365 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling. Noteworthy was that every school interviewed stressed they were providing a 21st century curriculum often regardless of their specified curriculum or testing regime.

- Authentic home – school collaboration. Pooling of home educational expertise and digital capability with that of the school. Respect for the home and the contribution it makes is fundamental to successful digital normalisation and collaborative teaching.
- Escalating focus on desired 21<sup>st</sup> century educational benefits and their realisation – both in and outside school.
- Collaboration in learning – trend pointing to ever greater collaboration between all the ‘teachers’ of the young in the 24/7/365 teaching from birth onwards.

## Leadership

- Strong shaping vision focused on improving learning. Though the affordances of technology and the digital world are taken strongly into account their visions are driven by educational understanding not by technology.
- Strong leadership. The vital role of principals/heads able to shape the desired ever-evolving school.
- Leadership’s high expectations
- Political acumen of the leadership – well versed in the art of keeping key stakeholders onside while protecting their own backside even when making major changes that run counter to prevailing policy.
- Big picture strategic plan – that provides focus but also the flexibility to vary the plan as the need arises.
- Riding the megatrends. Capability of the leadership to read, and ride the megatrends and when apt to move off and to the next.
- Protecting the teachers from overload, that can come from individual enthusiasm and external sources, by prioritising what the school will address.
- Trust. Moving from the traditional default position of distrust in all except those in school’s leadership group – to trust in all. Key facet of the empowerment. Fundamental to total school digital normalisation.

## **A culture of change**

- Developing and maintaining a strong culture of change within the organisation, where calculated risk taking was promoted. In most situations the culture was facilitated by the school leadership, but in some was also assisted by the local education authority, though we are also aware of examples where the culture of change was achieved despite the local education authority.
- All the schools openly acknowledged mistakes made in their evolution, some major and expensive. On-going, often rapid and uncertain change and evolution perceived as the norm.
- Readiness to evolve, transform, change the organisational form of the school.
- Time – needed to grow, evolve in form and develop.

## **Devolved decision-making**

- Significant school-based decision-making. Virtually all of the schools studied had very considerable control over their own operations with invariably a single line budget enabling them to use the monies allocated as desired. There were some however which have 'managed' to be largely semi-autonomous even though in theory they and their budget was centrally controlled.
- School specific solution. Recognition of the imperative of developing a solution apposite for the particular school in its context at this point in time.
- Empowerment of all the 'teachers' of the young - the children themselves, the parents, grandparents, carers, teachers and the wider school community. Entails all being respected, trusted, given a voice and having their 'teaching' contribution systematically enhanced.

## **Highly professional teachers working as a team**

- Teachers' quest to constantly enhance the quality, appropriateness and effectiveness of their teaching
- All pervasive educational focus – ensuring the digital is deployed as best as possible to assist achieve school's shaping educational vision.
- Distributed control of and responsibility for the teaching, with the educators ceding their unilateral control.
- Pronounced shift to in school, tailored whole staff development. Finding the time.
- Teachers' focus is on application of the student's technical capability in higher order teaching, for the first time in history not teaching the mechanics of how to use the instructional technology.

### **Students taking responsibility for their learning and that of others.**

- Students accorded greater responsibility for shaping own learning and teaching in and out of school.
- Marked shift to more personalised, collaborative mode of learning and teaching – in and outside school walls.
- School's recognition of young children's digital understanding of the workings of their own technological kit.
- Providing all with in the school's community, including the children the right of and responsibility for choosing their own suite of digital technology they want to use at school
- Recognition that children in normalising the use of their own suite of digital and network technology become free agents able to take their clientele anyway in the networked world.

### **Creation of an ecology**

- Development of a tightly integrated, ever evolving whole school ecology that consistently fosters the desired teaching and learning.
- Recognition of the home/out of school 24/7/365 use of the digital and the desirability of building upon that capability and access to resources in C21 schooling.
- Organisational integration – driven often unwittingly by ever- greater digital convergence.
- Focus on using digital to enhance organisational efficiency, effectiveness, synergy and productivity.

### **Technology for purpose pervading and supporting all operations**

- Tight nexus between desired educational benefits and use of the digital, with the educational benefits always being the key focus
- Appropriate digital technology in every teaching room that assists all teachers shift from a paper to predominantly digital teaching base. Of note all but one of the schools used interactive whiteboards to achieve that shift.
- Networked resourcing. Extension of home – school pooling into the school’s local and networked community.
- Appropriate whole campus/classroom access to the requisite network infrastructure
- ‘Personal’ digital kit in hands of all within the school’s community – the staff, the students and the homes – at least from around age 10 upwards.
- Equity – ensuring no student was left without his/her own technology, to use 24/7/365. All schools addressed the relatively small percentage in need of kit ‘in house’.
- BYOT – underscoring BYOT and not simply BYOD.

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