

Infinity Learning Maps case study

A principal engages parents in their children's learning

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<http://infinitylearn.org/>

Introduction

Infinity Learning Maps are a novel way for students to understand the web of interactions surrounding their learning with support from their teachers and parents. A brief definition of the approach is outlined in the box below.

Infinity Learning Maps are a practical in-road into the science of learning-how-to-learn. The approach provides a tool for teachers to support students to draw a picture of how they see the interactions surrounding their learning. Teachers then support students to analyse their web of interactions to decide if they need to make any changes to their learning situations. The process of drawing, analysing and making changes to current learning situations tends to lift student confidence and achievement and cause teachers and parents to rethink their respective support roles. For more detail about the process and use of Infinity Learning Maps go to <http://bit.ly/InfinityOnlineResource>

The Infinity Learning Maps approach is not a stand-alone programme. School leaders, teachers and students typically integrate the approach into regular cycles of leadership, teaching and learning. In this case about Konini Primary School, principal Andrea Scanlan used the approach to engage parents into new ways of supporting their children's learning.

About the principal of Konini Primary School

Parent engagement in past-focused schooling typically involved social, cultural, sporting and fundraising activities. Andrea Scanlan, a first time principal appointed to Konini School at the beginning of 2015 wanted to maintain those traditional connections between school and home and, at the same time, link parents much more closely to their children's core academic learning. It was an ambitious vision particularly with busy schedules of teachers and parents in the modern world. Andrea partnered with two other schools in 2016 in Wainuiomata, an outer suburb of Wellington in New Zealand (NZ), and Infinity facilitator Mary Wootton to design a strategy that would work for the students and their families and whānau (Indigenous term for extended families). The three schools chose to use Infinity Learning Maps as a critical tool within the strategy. This case study focuses specifically on Konini Primary School and the principal's strategy within that school. Konini Primary School scaled up the Infinity Maps approach from a group of 25 Konini students involved in the national research trial in 2015 to all students in 2016.



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Activity 1; Family and whānau engagement strategy.

The 2016 school year started with staff, from all three schools, attending a professional learning day to learn about the Infinity Learning Maps approach from Infinity facilitator, Mary Wootton. The day focused on updating the teachers, support staff and school leaders with the changes from earlier versions of Learning Maps, which focused on strategic improvements, to the Infinity Maps personalised approach. Wootton recommended that the leaders and teachers continue with their strategic improvements and, at the same time, start focusing more sharply on personalised improvements for each child.

Instead of launching straight into the mapping exercises with the students, principal Andrea Scanlan and her staff, organised a direction-setting community gathering in the second week of the school year. Andrea explained to parents that the school-wide focus for the year was on active learning and family and whānau (extended family) engagement. Her desire was to capture the perspectives of parents and caregivers about: *‘what is important to you in your child’s learning?’* Parents/caregivers talked with one another and with their children in small groups to capture their thoughts on large pieces of paper, which were then collated and shared with the whole group.

Infinity facilitator Wootton and Konini School teachers introduced the mapping process to the parents making links to the school-wide focus of active learning and as a way to grow learning relationships with parents and the school.

“They [the maps] help us to identify what we need to keep doing and what we need to change. Students can say what they need to do to grow as a learner. Whānau [extended family] and teachers can then support the child to reach their goals. It’s about partnerships in learning. They [the maps] are personal.”
(Kelly Layton, February 2016)

The teachers then supported all the students to complete the first round of Infinity Learning Maps activities. After completing those activities, the staff (teachers, leaders and support staff) attended another professional learning day, to reflect on their attempts to facilitate the approach. They shared gems and challenges and identified trends across the maps. Towards the end of the day, the teachers also planned how the Infinity Maps would be used at the parent-student-teacher learning conversations.

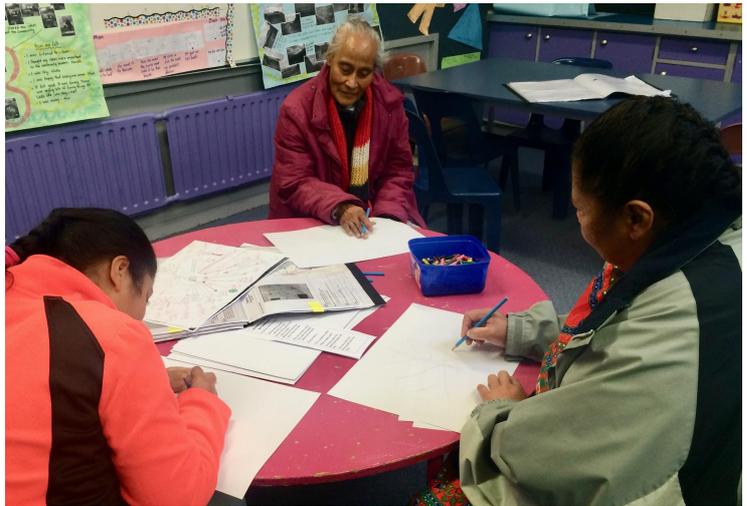
The school then held their first 3-way student-parent-teacher learning conversations. Students used their Infinity Map as the basis of the conversation. They had a template to use in their discussions. The template included their map and a table which recorded their change priorities and the support that their teachers and parents were offering them. (Here is a link to an example of a completed template <http://bit.ly/2ixU7lq> . The teachers requested a longer than usual session with each family (30 minutes) as the conversations were far more interactive than previous conferences led by teachers.

Impact of the family and whānau engagement strategy.

The first positive impact was that teachers got to know their children, families and whānau [extended family] so much better early in the year. The experience was equally valuable for the parents. The school requested the Infinity facilitator meet with groups of parents who were interested in talking about the learning at Konini School in 2016. Generally, parents felt their children were more responsible for their own learning and that the Maps were really useful to support learning talk at home: *“We have put it [her map] on the fridge, when she gives up, we talk about her goal of growing resilience.”* Parents also noted the leadership direction being taken in the school; staff were positive and approachable and the maps helped those conversations.

Parents were surveyed to give feedback about the new way of having three-way learning conversations. Quotes from parents found overwhelming support for the approach;

- *I enjoyed being able to view my child’s Infinity Map,*
- *It allowed my husband and I to have a look at what and who our children see are important to their learning,*
- *Infinity Maps have given my son and us a sense of ownership and belonging.*
- *I like the concept of Infinity Maps, the self-discovery of the child, opposed to the “tell” approach from the teacher - great “buy in” strategy.*
- *It was really interesting to see and hear him describe his Infinity Map.*
- *Infinity Maps seem like a great tool to help kids understand that learning can occur anywhere and they can learn from anyone.*
- *Since Infinity Maps I need to take a “guide on the side” kind of role and praise her for being an active learner.*



There was also a positive consequential impact in that the three-way conversations caused the teachers to reflect on what they needed to do differently to ensure their students became more active learners. There was a mid-year conference where students shared their reflections from map one and set new actions. At the end of the year, students then reflected on map two and changes they had made and the reflections were included in the end-of-year school report.

Concluding comment

Engaging families and whānau [extended family] in core academic learning is not easy. This case study exemplifies strong principal leadership to ensure that families and whānau (extended family) fully understand the way learning is changing as schools gear up to develop future-focused learning environments. Principal Andrea Scanlan's community-based sense-making strategy signals a new level of creativity in pushing out the boundaries of learning into communities by an inspirational first time principal. The Infinity Learning Maps approach not only opened up discussions about new possibilities in home-school partnerships, it also activated the golden triangle of teachers, students, families and whānau (extended families) to take their share of responsibility in supporting children to learn-how-to-learn.

Acknowledgements

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