INCREASING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

Through Innovative Schooling

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

DANIEL O'HARA

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i. Acknowledgements

The Fellow would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who generously gave their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide him throughout his DET Higher Education and Skills Group Fellowship.

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Personal Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all those who supported and assisted me in my Fellowship journey for their advice, support, hard work, time and most of all their belief in me to leave my comfort zone and tackle the challenges that exist in researching engaging disadvantaged learners.

Specifically, I would like to personally thank Wendy Draayers and Nick Johns from the International Specialised Skills Institute who at different times were my mentors and editors, scrutinising my drafts and providing valuable insights. To get me started on the journey I would like to thank Ben Vasiliou CEO of Youth Projects who inspired me and gave me the confidence to go for it. Additionally, a huge thank you goes to Carol Smith and her team at the Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network and Mary Tresize-Brown from the South East Local Learning and Employment Networks. Your support is greatly appreciated. And to Inge who assisted in research design over numerous meetings. Thank you for challenging me to aim high.

Of course, this could not have been possible without the international support and generous offering of knowledge, experience and hospitality from the sites of best practice I visited. Firstly, I would like to thank the (now former) CEO Mary-Anne Checkley for her thorough vetting of my credentials and intent before allowing me to visit iScoil and then her successor Brian Fitzsimons and his talented and passionate team who gave me so much time and freely shared information. I would also like to thank Sabrina Heimig-Schloemer the CEO of NewSchool in Berlin for showing me such a unique educational approach and inviting me into her school. A warm thank you goes to Dominic Fraßmann from Street College in Berlin for multiple meetings over coffee to really understand the innovative educational approach of Street College while also critiquing it, and also for his hospitality (and chocolates). A special thank you goes to Cath Evans and her family for being an incredibly generous host in Berlin and ensuring that all our needs were met and that our stay was memorable.

Finally, the biggest thankyou of all goes to my wife Alison for her enduring love and support, seamless management of our family while I studied and endless patience in listening to me talk about my research.

Thank you.

ii. Executive Summary
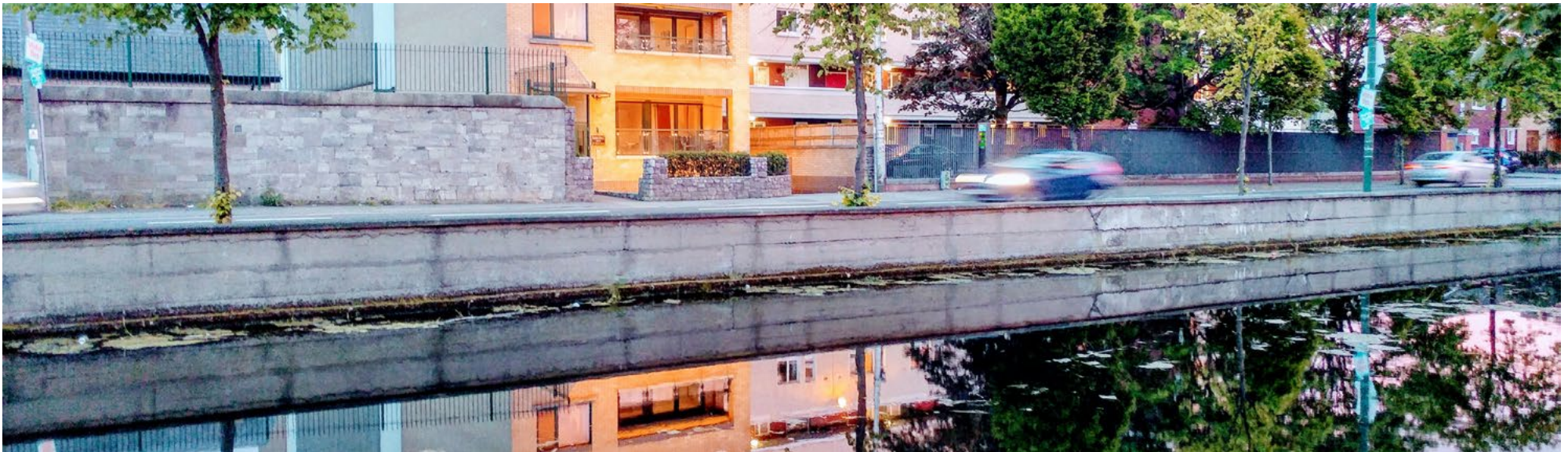
Fellowship Background

The importance of seeking innovative ways to engage disadvantaged learners has never been more pressing than it is today. In Australia a concerning number of young people are disengaging from education each year despite the best efforts of families, educators, community groups and state and federal government. In Victoria alone around 10,000 young people in Years 9 to 12 leave school completely each year, in most cases having a lifelong negative impact (Merlino, 2016), while nationally the figure of early school leavers is over 37,000 annually (Lamb and Huo, 2017).

The impact on young people whose circumstances have resulted in education milestones not being achieved are widely documented. Young people who have left school before completing Year 12 are at a greater risk of low income or unemployment, social exclusion, engaging in risky behaviours and committing crimes (Hancock, 2015). When the young person goes on to have a family of their own their ability to support their child's schooling is diminished and the likelihood of intergenerational disengagement and the negative consequences associated are increased (Hancock, 2015).

In 2017 the Mitchell Institute released a report that calculated the lifetime financial cost of an Australian early school leaver analysing the fiscal burden on the government and tax payer at $334,600 per student. Furthermore, if including the social costs such as increased cost in the criminal justice system, the public health system and loss of tax revenue, an extra cost of $616,200 per student needs to be considered over the lifetime of the learner (Lamb, Huo, 2017).

Therefore, the question of increasing learner engagement is not just critical to the wellbeing of our communities but also to meet industry requirements and strengthen our economy. For this to occur it is time to invest in new approaches that will result in the sector that needs it the most, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, to be at the pinnacle of innovative educational practices.

Fellowship Learnings: Engagement, Interaction and Collaboration and Learning Tools and Technologies

My primary focus of the Fellowship was to investigate engagement strategies and approaches that have been successful in bringing marginalised and disadvantaged learners into education, so they have the confidence and skills to progress into vocational training or employment. I have focussed on three aspects of learning: engagement, interaction and collaboration, learning tools and technologies.

My findings illustrate that schools less frequently attempt to bring the disengaged student back into the fold of schooling, rather schools examine ways they can change to fit the needs of all students.

For example, in Ireland the innovative school iScoil works in partnership with industry, youth justice programs, welfare services and mainstream schools offering an online learning environment that uses adaptive technology and a content management system to offer an alternative to mainstream school. Tutors and mentors work individually with students to create individual learning plans based around the students' interest.

Interacting with others is commonly held as the main indicator of active participation and an important element in education. The findings from this report indicate that each site of best practice recognised this factor and approached interaction and collaboration in different ways. However, all sites recognised the benefits of exposing young people to authentic learning experiences that replicate real-life work settings utilising their local industry and community as partners.

The research from this report illustrates that learning tools and technologies must be specific to the student's vocational focus and at industry standard. To achieve this the learning tools and technologies used in the progressive school in NewSchool, Berlin, were closely related to the student's project and its real-life application. For example, if it were three-dimensional animation, film making or games development then the student would have access to industry current computer hardware and software, greens screens and camera equipment. In some instances it would not be financially feasible to cater for the appropriate learning tools and technologies for each student, so partnerships with industry were sought.

Personal Impact

Travelling to Europe and visiting education settings that were successfully engaging disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, despite the familiar challenges they faced, personally validated much of the work I have undertaken for the past eight years. I learnt that issues such as providing effective wrap around services to support young people to be learning ready, or difficulties in administration processes that allow for program flexibility, are all shared internationally.

Professional Impact

Professionally this Fellowship has enabled me to dramatically increase my network and become aware of the broader connections and possibilities for engaging disadvantaged learners. I have met with peers working in the not-for-profit sector

who run programs, spoken to VET trainers about new applications of blended learning, chatted with members of a school council who have experience in transferring ideas into working applications in Australia and also spoken with students about ways we could better cater to their needs.

Sectoral Impact

Across the sector there are common frustrations around the inability to provide a disadvantaged young person an appropriate level of educational support. I have seen teachers printing out worksheets and handing them to case managers to pass on to students as a last-ditch attempt to keep young people engaged and this is simply not good enough. My peers and colleagues, and indeed the sector can benefit from this research as it presents a best practice approach that can help them in their work and ultimately better engage those who need it the most, disadvantaged young people. If the approaches can be adapted locally and learner engagement in the VET sector increases, then the entire community will benefit.

Considerations, Recommendations

» Focus on what is working in term of engaging disadvantaged learners, as opposed to what is not working. Through investigating the best-practice examples internationally and carefully considering how these can be implemented in local settings, there is the opportunity to have enhanced engagement of young people and in turn improved outcomes for themselves, industry and the community.

» Adapt schools to meet learners' needs through putting the learners' voice at the centre of the school curriculum, school structure and culture. Having your voice heard is a powerful motivator for engagement.

» Enabling self-paced educational programs. Too often a student disengages because they feel left behind by the rest of the group. Similarly, a student who completes work quickly loses interest while waiting for the rest of the group to catch up. Personalising the content and removing timelines reduces anxiety and increases engagement.

» A more meaningful end of school certificate that is based on lifelong learning principles and employability skills. This certificate is more easily understood by industry and reflects individually on the young person, making it more relevant than the current year 12 certificate or Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking.

» High quality teachers are still the most important component of a school regardless of whether they are working in face-to-face or online modes of teaching and therefore they must be undertaking continuous professional learning.

» Situating schools in real-life employment settings and/or using the same tools and technologies is desirable. The benefits of students being in proximity to industry and having trained on the same tools and technologies will increase engagement as learning is purposeful.

» Enhanced online learning options offers a viable alternative to those who do not attend school. These online or blended options require specially trained staff and continual mentoring to be effective.

» Education hubs operating out of community centres greatly increases the scope of learning opportunities and offers wrap-around services to young people. Online learning options can be accessed from these hubs.

» Recognising the specific training required to work in online spaces differs greatly from traditional methods and therefore these teachers, tutors, content specialists, mentors and other staff need to be suitable trained and qualified.

1. Fellowship Background

Context

In Australia a concerning number of young people are disengaging from education each year despite the best efforts of families, educators, community groups and State and Federal government. In many instances the young person's experience of school is so negative they refuse to go. In Victoria alone around 10,000 young people in Years 9 to 12 leave school completely each year, in most cases having a lifelong negative impact (Merlino, 2016), while nationally the figure of early school leavers is over 37,000 annually (Lamb and Huo, 2017).

The issue of educational disengagement is not exclusively Australian, nor is it new. Globally young people disengage from education annually with each country grappling with the issue as best it can and with varied success. There are some success stories internationally, namely in Germany and Ireland, and although there are vastly different educational approaches across the world the commonality is the serious consequences that follow when young people do not complete school.

The impact on young people whose circumstances have resulted in education milestones not being achieved are widely documented. Young people who have left school before completing Year 12 are at a greater risk of low income or unemployment, social exclusion, engaging in risky behaviours and committing crimes (Hancock, 2015). When the young person goes on to have a family of their own, their ability to support their child's schooling is diminished and the likelihood of intergenerational disengagement and the negative consequences associated are increased (Hancock, 2015). Of course, not all young people who disengage from school will end up on such a pathway, however, engagement at school remains a significant issue for the intergenerational persistence of disadvantage.

In 2017 the Mitchell Institute released a report that calculated the lifetime financial cost of an Australian early school leaver analysing the fiscal burden on the government and tax payer at $334,600 per student. Further, if including the social costs such as increased cost in the criminal justice system, the public health system and loss of tax revenue, an extra cost of $616,200 per student needs to be taken into account over the lifetime of the learner. Considering all of the early school leavers in Australia each year the fiscal and social cost to the economy is a staggering $896 million (Lamb, Huo, 2017)

Figure 1 – Fiscal and Social impacts of early school leavers in monetary terms, Mitchell Institute 2017

It is often a web of complex and interrelated factors that contribute to why a student may disengage from school. Educational issues such as high stress

environments and high stakes testing, poor quality teaching due to lack of teacher support or insufficient professional development and a lack of resources play a significant part in the story of a disengaged student. Similarly issues completely unrelated to their education including, personal, family, health, social, economic and emotional issues combine to create insurmountable barriers to school completion (Prendergast, Glenda, 2018). With so many diverse factors impacting on this issue more than one solution is required.

Ten years ago, Australia recognised the need to completely reimagine its curriculum as it was anticipated that we needed to be educated for a rapidly changing future. To achieve this the Melbourne Declaration (2008) was formed. This declaration called on schools to ensure its students were confident, creative, active and informed citizens as well as successful learners. From this the Australian Curriculum (Foundation to Year 10) was designed to achieve the Melbourne Declaration's goals however many commentators argue that its implementation and senior secondary schooling models were not defined nor was there a clear funding approach (Gonski D. et al., 2018).

> **The Gonski review was correct when it surmised that Australia lacks a logical, consistent and publicly transparent approach to schools funding, and was equally correct when it advocated for funding reform based on allocation of money according to student need.**

Uneven playing field: The state of Australia's schools, Bonnor and Shepard, 2016, p 9.

With many of the Gonski review reforms now being implemented the impact of a more equitable funding model is currently being felt nationwide. In Victoria under the Education State initiatives there are programs aimed at restoring the balance for students experiencing disadvantage such as the Navigator Services Program, Reconnect, Lookout Education Support Centres which all contribute to providing wrap around services including case management, flexible learning options and increased learning support. Other measures are being taken to keep young people in school too, such as healthy eating and breakfast clubs, wellbeing

professionals, psychologists and nurses permanently employed in schools. These measures are a step forward for education in a Victorian mainstream school.

Despite these measures many young people are still leaving the mainstream education system making them ineligible for many of the above-mentioned wrap around services. This may be because the young person requires more of an alternate setting or a more flexible program that caters to their needs with flexible attendance requirements. Ellum and Longmuir (2013) assert that equitable resourcing between disadvantaged learners and their mainstream schooling counterparts needs to be considered to decrease the gap that further disadvantages the students who require the most assistance. When a young person chooses to leave the mainstream system for an alternative provider they immediately enter a vastly different educational landscape.

Figure 2 – Traditional classroom

The alternative education options for a student who is experiencing hardship, illness or trauma are limited. If they are over 17 they can seek to enrol in a 'non-school' setting such as a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) provider or registered training organisation (RTO). These adult learner settings can deliver a senior secondary certificate in a more flexible way however they often lack the

resources and support mechanisms of a mainstream school as their focal point is adult learners. If they are under 17 and wish to enrol in a more flexible 'non-school' program, they are required to obtain permission from the Department of Education and this can be a lengthy process as you have to convince the department of the suitability of the transition. In recent years there is a trend of independent schools offering an alternative option to mainstream schooling which, although too early to measure accurately, is anecdotally having a positive impact.

For students from a disadvantaged background educational progression may require more detours than for the average student. As Buddelmeyer (2016) argues that despite these detours, progression is very important as the gap between attaining a year 12 certificate compared with those who do not progress to this stage is significant. Therefore, whatever measures can be taken to support completion at this level will result in a high level of social inclusion and "reforms that increase the accessibility and opportunity to enrol in VET will be taken up by all students, including disadvantaged students" (Buddelmeyer, 2016, p. 10). It is because of this that we must open our eyes to other possibilities of learning that do not fit the current model.

The importance of seeking innovative ways to engage disadvantaged learners has never been more pressing than it is today. Currently all of these options still fit inside the traditional model of bricks and mortar schooling, that is with limited flexibility to conduct teaching and learning outside of a physical school. With few flexible options available to young people experiencing barriers to education in mainstream schooling it is in the national interest to seek out more innovative ways to deliver education.

In relation to these challenges my Fellowship research has two main objectives. My first objective has been to research engagement strategies both online and traditional (face-to-face) that have been successful in bringing marginalised and disadvantaged learners into education. It is an eternal challenge for any educator to engage learners into the massive amount of learning content while avoiding creating anxiety and pressure at the same time. Indeed, recent research by Flexible Learning Victoria (Johns and Parker, 2017) seeks to redefine the notion of success in school. Everyday measures, such as the completion of Year 12, are often not a feasible benchmark of whether the learner has 'succeeded or failed' due to the fact that often the circumstances impacting on this are beyond the learner's control. Such research provides a valuable contribution to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector as a student who experiences trauma, mental illness, housing insecurity and bullying is more likely to give up on education. Subsequently, more pragmatic approaches and innovative models are needed.

The second objective is to bring this strategy and any associated learning tools and technologies to Victoria in order to support VET providers who struggle with maintaining student engagement and are at a loss with the numerous and often confusing blended learning tools and approaches currently available.

Although efforts must be aimed at preventing learners disengaging from education in the first instance, this Fellowship is focussed on the learners who are already disengaged or have never successfully engaged in education. Both online and traditional (face-to-face) approaches have been chosen to research as certain approaches suit specific circumstances, and these will be contrasted and analysed. Implementing a best practice model here in Victoria would result in better outcomes for the students and in the long run, the entire community.

Fellowship Methodology

Research approach

Before undertaking the Fellowship, I consulted with a research designer to ensure my research approach would maximise the depth of understanding of the sites of best practice in the very short time that I had visiting them. Over numerous workshops we agreed upon a strategy of both a primary and secondary data collection and devised questionnaires, discussion guides, a literature review

and reflective journal questions that could then be collected and analysed. This approach allowed me to immerse myself in the sites of best practice conducting questionnaires, holding in depth one-on-one interviews and observing teaching and learning while allowing for a rich understanding of the perspectives of the participants and of my own assumptions. The secondary non-systematic review was an examination of a small sample of both formal, government and independent literature. This approach was used as it best suited the complexity and specificity of the real-life phenomenon being examined by this Fellowship.

Discussion guides encapsulating all the data I was aiming to collect were designed which specific questions and prompts for learners, educators and staff.

Figure 3 - Discussion Guide

Data Collection

1. Questionnaire (Primary) – 10 closed questions were written. These were used to collect demographic data such as age, level of study and time out of mainstream school (for learners), qualifications, prior experience and work load (for educators and staff).

2. Discussion Guide (Primary) – 10 open ended questions were written that focused on the themes of:

    » Engagement (4 Questions)

    » Interaction and Collaboration (2 Questions)

    » Learning Tools and Technologies (4 Questions)

3. Reflective Journal (Primary) – After each interview I wrote a reflective journal that recorded my thoughts and feelings as well as analysis and reflections of the data. This was then read with a critical lens to identify any bias or assumptions I may have been making at the time.

4. Literature Review (Secondary) - Small sample of both formal, government and independent literature.

Fellowship Time Period

The Fellowship research was conducted in June of 2018. Over the following 12 months synthesis of findings, dissemination and report writing occurred.

The timing of my visit saw the schools I was visiting going through a transformational period due to new European Union privacy laws. The implementation of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) mandates guidelines and regulations on how data collected online is processed, used, stored or exchanged (Shrivastava, 2018). Schools are rightly not immune to this regulation and therefore any school that uses an online system that holds student information will have to demonstrate the security of the data they are processing. They now also have to implement substantial technical and organizational measures to demonstrate their compliance with the GDPR on a continual basis. This meant that the technologists and administration staff at the schools I visited were carefully considering their policies and procedures to ensure the security and safety or their data.

Fellow's Background (Bio)

Figure 4 – The Fellow teaching

Daniel O'Hara's enthusiasm for helping the underdog coupled with his adventurous spirit has seen him work with predominantly young people in a range of urban, regional, remote and international educational settings. After completing a double degree in Secondary Education and Arts Daniel first worked in mainstream high schools where he gravitated towards helping the students who were struggling to find their place and were consequently at risk of disengaging from school. Dissatisfied with the rigid structures and lack of innovative approaches Daniel then travelled and worked in many sectors and settings throwing himself into the deep end. This included working in the Netherlands at international schools teaching primary ages students, North East Arnhem Land in a small community teaching secondary students, and also to an inner-city adult education centre teaching all ages of students. Throughout these experiences Daniel sought to find universal characteristics of learning that defy age, culture, or socio-economic boundaries.

In 2012 Daniel was awarded an Adult Learning Excellence Award (Box Hill Institute) and was a Finalist for Excellence in Innovation (Adult, Community and Further Education) for his work with learners who have suffered from chronic housing issues, where he devised a highly personalised digital literacy program aimed to re-engage them into education and build self-esteem.

While working with vulnerable young people aged 15 to 19 in Melbourne, Daniel was invited to develop an online curriculum to cater for students who experience barriers to education, including geographical, social, psychological and physical, aiming for a pathway into vocational education. This daunting task was Daniel's first foray into online learning and instructional design. Working with a talented team they managed to develop an entirely online Victorian Certificate of Applied (VCAL) program using Moodle as the learner management system and various Web 2.0 technologies. It was this experience that sparked Daniel's interest into the need for a critical approach to online learning.

Following on from this Daniel conducted an applied research project on blended learning and engagement of disadvantaged learners as part of his Master of Education study at Monash University. During this project Daniel questioned the uncritical adoption of Learner Management Systems and web 2.0 technologies for teaching VCAL to disadvantaged learners. Daniel then explored solutions on how to best maximize engagement by listening to the learner's perspective, allowing for the learners to have their voice heard and contribute to the research. Findings from this project revealed the potential for increased engagement using blended learning was possible only if a considered and carefully planned approach was undertaken.

Since completing his Master of Education Daniel has worked in Youth Education in a not-for-profit managing multi-site youth programs and now most recently as a lead teacher in a specialist independent school in Melbourne's South-East suburbs. In his current role Daniel leads a team that is reinventing the curriculum to cater for the students' interests, consider their differentiated needs and equip them with 21st century skills. Daniel is committed to improving the lives of those less fortunate and believes quality education, community involvement and a holistic approach is required.

2. Fellowship Learnings

Introduction

My primary focus of the Fellowship was to investigate engagement strategies and approaches that have been successful in bringing marginalised and disadvantaged learners into education, so they have the confidence and skills to progress into vocational training or employment.
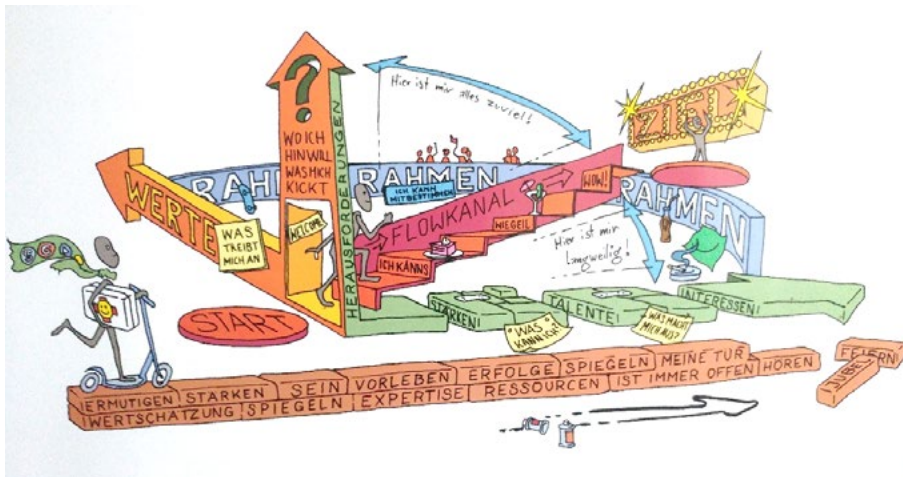

Figure 5 - Street College Philosophy, Berlin, Germany

This section describes the international sites of best practice visited followed by an analysis of what key findings my research uncovered and the specific points of difference these sites offer the Australian education landscape. The overarching themes of engagement, interaction and collaboration, and learning tools and technologies are used to group the information in terms of how these findings can translate into the Australian context and benefit the next generation of Australians.

Rather than a cursory visit to as many places as I could find I organised to spend extended time in two targeted organisations that I had been communicating with for 12 months prior to my Fellowship travel. Furthermore, I planned time to see what other opportunities may arise while I was in Europe and this proved invaluable as I stumbled upon a third site of best practice while in Germany.

Site 1 – iScoil, Dublin, Ireland

My first visit was to iScoil's headquarters in Dublin, Ireland. iScoil ('Scoil' meaning 'school' in Irish) was created as an evolution of the Not School program initiated in the U.K. in 2009 that aimed to reinvent schooling using online technologies for those who refuse to attend.

Figure 6 - iScoil Head Quarters, the Acorn Centre, Dublin, Ireland

iScoil has a holistic view of learners and comes out of a response to the community to engage students from chaotic home life and the ramifications from that experience. Working in partnership with industry, youth justice programs, welfare services and mainstream schools iScoil offers an online learning environment that uses adaptive technology and a content management system to offer online learning. Tutors and mentors work individually with students to create individual learning plans based around the students' interest. Content is developed in house by the tutors, so it remains unique and tailored to the individual. Remarkably iScoil has an 82% success rate of student completion and has won the ThinkTech Award in 2016.

The innovative approach of iScoil has always been a perpetual evolution of ideas and practices based in research evidence followed by a rigorous evaluation of the practice. While I was there iScoil were underway preparing to develop the next curriculum phase in response to the demands from both students and parents who had successful experiences with the original program. There was also requests from the industry sector to apply the iScoil approach to vocational training.

Recognising the need to offer innovative solutions to early school leavers (14-16 year olds) across Ireland, iScoil offers two options to young people to re-engage in learning and succeed in their educational goals. Firstly, you can enrol and undertake online learning in the comfort and privacy of your own home with the agreement and support of a parent or guardian. Secondly, iScoil partners with local services and agencies to create a safe place to learn - these are called Blended Learning Centres. Currently there are 17 Blended Learning Centres operating that enable the young person to study through iScoil and also offer other youth related services. Both options combine instructional content with individual mentoring and tutoring support to guide each student along their journey, building up an assessable portfolio of work, leading to accreditation.

Whilst at iScoil I spent generous time with the CEO, the Head of Learning, the Learning Technologist, mentors and tutors, key administration staff, Blended Learning Centre support worker staff, students and parents.

Figure 7 – iScoil Team

Site 2 – NewSchool, Berlin, Germany

The second site I visited was NewSchool in Berlin, Germany, where students are referred to as 'talents' exemplifying their positive and unique approach to education. Situated in Factory Berlin, an international community of innovators and change makers inspired by Andy Warhol's Factory in New York, NewSchool deliberately exposes its 'talents' to this melting pot of bright minds in tech, politics, arts and science.

Figure 8 - NewSchool Team

NewSchool is an ethical, social-critical, ecological and sustainable school that aims to change the lives of inspired and creative young people from the 7th to 10th grade. Where mainstream schooling's rigid structures have left a young person feeling isolated and repressed, NewSchool reignites the creative spirit and

passion for learning. NewSchool does this through its exclusively project based approach tailoring interdisciplinary content to individuals and connecting with places of action whether they be in industry or nature, using online technologies to break down geographical barriers.

Working together with mentors, coaches and the school management, students of NewSchool have access to entrepreneurs, artists, general managers, tradesman and experts to develop transnational projects. This direct experience model connects students to employability skills in a powerful way.
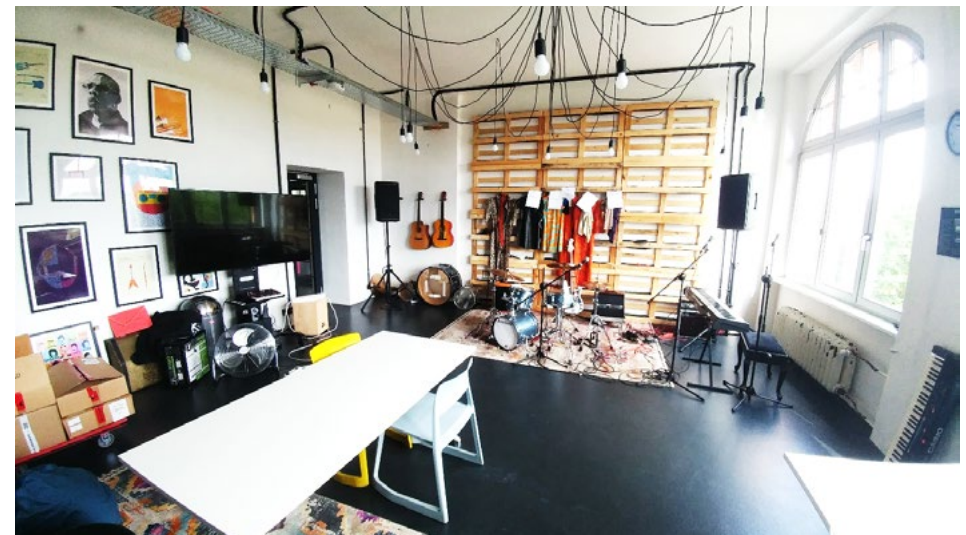

Figure 9 - NewSchool Studio, Berlin, Germany

The enrolment process for NewSchool involves a prospective talent pitching an innovative project idea to the leadership team. If the pitch is successful there is a two-week trial period to see if the student is committed to the opportunity and able to work in the communal creative environment while being supported by the team. From here the talents develop time and project management skills,

problem solving and critical thinking skills. There are daily workshops around themes including renewable energy, theatre, project management, design thinking, music production, performance, graphic design and subjects from the mainstream curriculum. Talents are also strongly encouraged and supported to learn communication skills in the real world including making phone calls, sending e-mails, writing applications and visiting companies to organise internships. Everyone learns from everyone at NewSchool.

While at NewSchool I spent time with the CEO, the school principal, curriculum teachers, talents, experts, coaches, administration staff and parents.

Site 3 – Street College, Berlin, Germany

The final international site of best practice I visited was Street College also in Berlin, Germany, created by Gangway - a social work organisation operating on the streets of Berlin. Founded in 1990 and funded by local government and private donations Gangway aims to work with marginalized, stigmatized and handicapped young adults including those with drug addiction and empower them to be active citizens with a strong focus on multiculturalism and social justice while also providing educational opportunities.

Figure 10 - Street College Head Quarters, Gangway e.V. in Berlin, Germany

Street College is an innovative network for individual, autonomous education. It offers a free space where the interests of those who are determined to pursue their goals are given the opportunity. With this unique approach Street College focusses on a student's wishes and goals, then finds the right professionals who can pass on their knowledge and experience to build their learning - no matter which field of study it is.

There are currently six faculties that students have requested tuition in: Arts and Design, Technology, Sports, Music and Media, Languages and International Relations, which are running courses that students have requested. These courses depend on the students' interest and could be set in a studio, a company or even the streets. Students who have been with Street College for some time have the opportunity to learn through exchange with partners in New York, Michigan, Sao Paulo, London, Stockholm and The Hague or building new partnerships worldwide.

Interestingly Street College graduates receive an individual diploma describing and confirming their specific talents, development desires and potentials. The criteria is developed with a board of trustees of experts from the fields of law, ethnology, coaching as well as cultural and art studies based on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). The diploma is then used as a descriptive and accurate certificate to gain employment.

While at Street College I spent time with the mentors, teachers and administrators.

At all three targeted sites discussions were conducted on the following topics:

» governance structure

» funding model

» profile of the young people

» partnerships with agencies

» community connections

» end to end experience of the students

» transitions to next steps

» tutor/mentor qualifications/experience

» learning tools and digital technologies

» blended learning approach

» accreditation bodies

» course content

» learner management systems

Analysis of findings

As mentioned in the Methodology my Fellowship research aimed to conduct both primary and secondary research through devised questionnaires, discussion guides, a literature review and reflective journal to help me understand why these sites of best practice were working so well.

All participants were first asked basic demographic information such as age, length of time in program, highest year level attained, and time spent studying at school vs. online (see Appendix 1). The participant was then asked specific question which were followed with 'why' in order to elicit a deeper understanding of the issue. For example, "What do you like about this program?" followed by "Why?" Further questions were divided into three categories (engagement, interaction and collaboration, and learning tools and technologies) and asked during a targeted yet informal discussion. The same interviewing technique was practiced with the mentors, tutors, experts, leadership and administration staff (see Appendix 2).
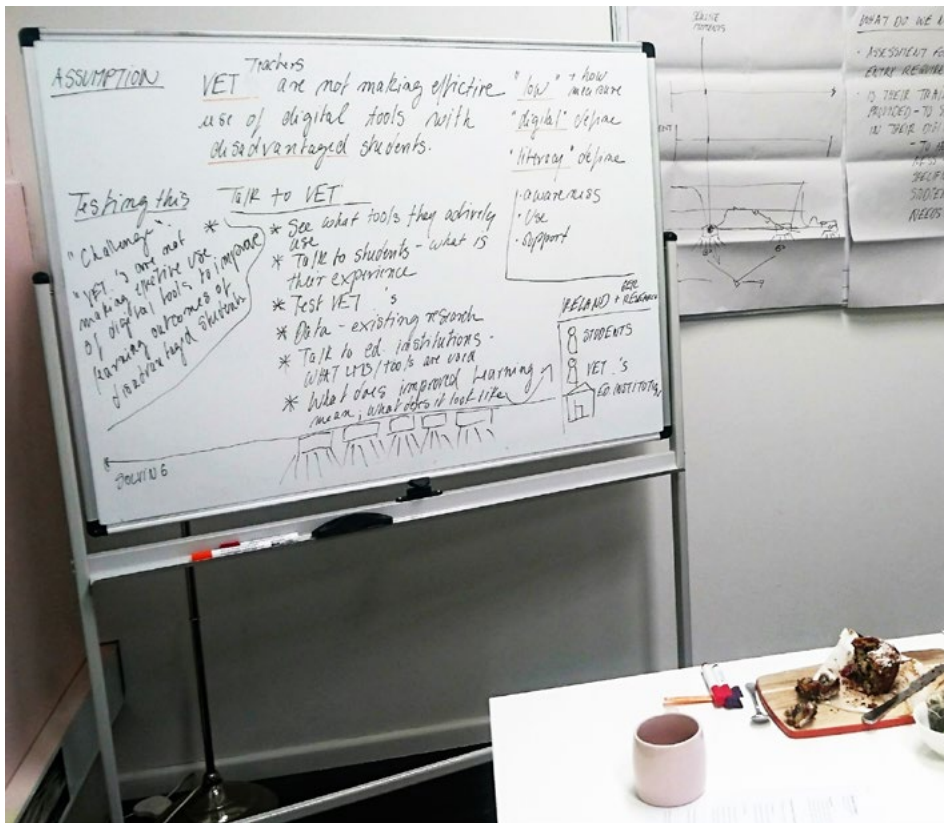
Figure 11 – Planning

Collating the demographic responses from the participants in each educational program across all three sites enables a clearer understanding of the needs, experiences and motivation of the young people. On average the young people in these programs are 14-18 years old, have had previous experiences at mainstream schooling which has isolated them from their peers, have suffered from low self-esteem and have missed a significant amount of schooling. In addition to this in some cases the young people also suffer from anxiety, depression, have been in the juvenile justice system and have experienced trauma.

Engagement

Taylor and Parson (2011) suggest that studies on engagement have evolved from a focus on students who are disengaged, not learning and beginning to become rebellious to focussing on students' characteristics who are learning. Through researching sites of best practice this approach has been adopted as the focus is on what works rather than what does not. A further shift in perspective is evident argues Taylor and Parsons (2011), as schools less frequently attempt to bring the disengaged student back into the fold of schooling, instead schools examine ways they can change to fit the needs of all students. Therefore, engagement strategies that are cohesive amongst the whole school considering their cohorts educational needs are required. This is true when considering all three sites of best practice visited as they all had designed their whole school approach around the young person's situation, needs and desires rather than trying to mould them to fit their structures.

In terms of what is meant by engagement, or how it is measured, a general consensus has not been agreed upon. This is partly due to the fact that there are several types: academic, social and emotional for example, and partly because it depends on how it is being measured – that is quantitative data such as attendance, standardized test scores, truancy and graduation rates or less easily measured data such as wellbeing. However, for the purposes of this research engagement is considered active participation measured by attendance physically in class and also in synchronous online sessions, work produced by participants and also wellbeing satisfaction levels measured by surveys.

Figure 12 – Thinking about engagement

iScoil, NewSchool and Street College all have a similar cohort of young people in terms of age and stage of development, and yet employ very different approaches to engage them in learning. iScoil's approach utilises an online platform and foster relationships with the learner through providing mentors who can have daily contact with them, adapting the curriculum based on the individual's interests and by employing tech savvy content specialists (tutors) to develop the personalised content. Street College and NewSchool also work on the students' interest and current academic level as the cornerstone of engagement in their programs as they found students were often struggling in mainstream school either because the work was too difficult, too easy or not relevant. However, NewSchool and

Street College differ from iScoil in the sense that they both require interaction in the same physical space as part of their educational requirement. This is seen as critical because they are equipping the students for employment as there next step and the students are at a stage where interaction with others is preferred over online learning.

All sites focus on positive reinforcement and building rapport as soon as possible with the students. At iScoil parents or guardians are phoned regularly, especially in the first few weeks while the study and communication routine is established. Daily feedback is given by tutors while mentors are available during business hours when the online platform is active. Outside of this time the tutors review the student's work and as one tutor commented "by responding to the students' work daily they receive timely feedback." This enables relationship building to occur over phone and the internet. In Street College and New School, the rapport is built during face-to-face sessions. iScoil does also offers face-to-face support at a Blended Learning Centre if desired for those students who are able to attend.

Figure 13 - Blended Learning Centre, Co. Longford

Interestingly at iScoil learners are discouraged from studying online outside of business hours as they are trying to build routines that suit most employment options. Therefore, if a student wants to log on at night they are unable to, as the system is down. One mentor commented on this aspect mentioning:

"Having the content accessible during normal work hours helps the students get into a routine where they are sleeping at night and active during the day, and it prepares them for jobs in the workforce, we want them to be able to get up and get going in the morning" – Sean, iScoil Mentor

A student agreed this approach suits him commenting:

"I like how I don't have to worry about it after the school day is finished, for me that's 3pm, even if I wanted to go and do some work at night I couldn't because the system is closed down until the next morning."

While I was visiting iScoil I was shown a letter from a parent explaining the dramatic change in her son.

The letter explained that after only two to three weeks there was a major difference in this behaviour as he realised he was capable of the work, his confidence grew, and his anger phased out. The parent put this down to two reasons. First was the daily praise her son received, and respectful positive language used. The second reason was that he was given work to his ability that he could go through at his own pace.

Street College approaches engagement through offering an opportunity for the student to create their own learning and focus on their interests. Attendance requirements are highly flexible showing the student that the onus for their learning is their responsibility. Because of this the students are motivated and more able to overcome challenges and successfully complete their work. As a student begins to see that they can successfully complete work their engagement increases and in turn their ability to remain with their peers is strengthened. As Buddelmeyer

(2016) asserts "increasing educational attainment directly increases inclusion." (p. 4). The amplification of the student voice at Street College, the physical community and the ability for the teachers to create learning from the students' interests all contribute to a highly engaging educational setting.

Figure - 14 NewSchool Computer

NewSchool's approach favours the students who are ready to take on the world but just need that extra support, mentoring and guidance to connect them to employment. The learning for a NewSchool student is authentic as the school is located alongside a start-up incubator allowing access to a wide range of industry specialists and real-world work opportunities. In addition to this the teachers are also qualified to deliver the high school certificate and can adapt the content to the chosen field of interest. Engagement in this sense is anchored in the authentic learning opportunities presented as well as focussing on the student's passions.

Interaction and collaboration

According to constructivist, collaborative and social learning theories interacting with others is commonly held as the main indicator of active participation and an important element in education (Michinov et al., 2011). This is supported by Reeves, Herrington and Oliver (2002) who advocate it as a key component of an authentic learning task. NewSchool's approach typifies this notion and strongly encourages not just their talents to interact with each other but as their website mentions "everyone learns from everyone" at NewSchool. As NewSchool is situated amongst a concentrated site of entrepreneurs, businessman, content specialists and educators this factor is easily achieved however when an opportunity is not presented locally NewSchool talent's use iPads and Skype to arrange calls and meetings to key people anywhere in the world.

For Street College interaction and collaboration is also considered an important part of the program and many students enjoy just being in the school for the social interaction it provides. Students at Street College are a mix of ages and to communicate and work together they must be able to collaborate with students of varied ages (17+) in group activities. The development of these skills is supported by the tutors and the option of individual work is also available.

For iScoil, interaction and collaboration are primarily facilitated through the Blended Learning Centres (BLC). I visited County Longford Youth Services, one of the longest running BLCs, and spent some time with the youth workers and students there. The friendly staff there mentioned that the cohort they attract benefit hugely from the social interaction that goes alongside the iScoil online study. The iScoil students could join in the other programs offered by the Youth Services such as adventure camps, excursions to the city and recreation activities in the local community. One of the students I spoke with mentioned that the structure of the day suited them perfectly. They started at 9am and worked until lunchtime getting additional support by the youth workers. Then everyone went to the local shop to grab lunch together. After they had eaten they all went upstairs and played a game of pool and hung out for an hour or so before going home.

The students I spoke with had renewed confidence about their ability to study and were considering returning to school once they had completed the certificate.

Figure 15 - iScoil student and parent conversation in action.

iScoil are currently developing online tasks they involve student collaboration as they note that interaction fosters mutual psychological support and benefits learning. There are many online learning communities, however facilitating these so they are focussed on meeting the students learning needs and are safe supportive spaces poses some challenges which need to be trialled and tested before being made a mainstay of their program. When asked what it is like to go online and study by yourself an iScoil student responded "…it's ok, I usually read my tutors feedback, or any other notes left, and this gives me the feeling that I'm working with someone. The mentor also gives me a call and we have a chat so that's pretty good."

All three sites had a proactive and collaborative approach with support and welfare agencies, parents and guardians, the local community and industry.

Communicating as a team each site operated on a highly professional level where the students' interests were at the centre of their decision making and it was pleasing to see an extraordinary amount of passion and energy dedicated to young people who were taking an alternative pathway in education.

Learning Tools and Technologies

The three sites visited all had a different approach to learning tools and technologies each highlighting the learning tool as a key component of teaching and learning. The learning tools and technologies used in NewSchool are closely related to the student's project and its real-life application. For example, if it was three-dimensional animation, film making or games development then the student would have access to industry current computer hardware and software, green screens and camera equipment. Street College has the same approach yet due to less funding it links the student with a professional or workplace that allows the student to use these tools. iScoil's approach is different again and focusses on using the internet and online technologies to provide the learning tools for their students. However, that brings with it a range of challenges.

Figure 16 - NewSchool iPads

Like Power and Morven-Gould (2011), Reeve's et al. (2002) adamantly state the enormous power of online learning if utilised correctly. However, the authors admit that creating authentic online learning activities it is not easily accomplished and "undoubtedly requires a great deal more thought and effort than the development of didactic, content-based instruction" (Reeves et al., 2002, p. 566), a consideration shared by Collis and Moonen (2002). Emma Watson's (2015) report Considerations for applying blended learning programs within TAFE argues that blended learning needs to be re-imagined to be effective. Therefore, questions arise about the quality of the blended learning content and the time given to staff to create it.

Shimbarukuro (2005) has commented on this phenomenon stating that "When we introduce new technology, we force them into the existing configurations" (p. 5) as that is what we are used to doing. Reeves et al. (2002) argue educational institutions have felt the pressure to put courses online swiftly and in doing so they have simply created websites with large tracts of text which effectively isolate and overwhelm the student. This act is an indication of the educational institutions ignoring "the great potential and the significant affordances of the Internet to enable authentic tasks to guide student learning" (Reeves et al., 2002, p. 565). These are some of the issues that can impact on student engagement.

Research shows (Nielsen, 1999) that most people scan websites with only 16% of people actually reading them. A common mistake when designing content for online learning is assuming that people read webpages the same way they read text books, resulting in webpages that are full of information that is not necessarily absorbed. Unless a student has the skills to either effectively research online or manage to process the information on websites effectively, online learning could potentially create a further barrier to education for non-traditional learners. As Levin (2007) points out "Technology in the form of online classes actually hampers student retention and creates an unfair condition for non-traditional students" (Levin, p. 84), where 'non-traditional' refers to students who have left mainstream schooling. This can be because non-traditional learner's digital literacy skills are often lower than mainstream students (Levin, 2007).

To overcome these issues iScoil inducts its mentors, tutors and students in the online learning tools they will be using making sure the tools are simple, cheap and universally accessible. The content creators have either experience or training in instructional design and constantly communicate with the learner to ensure they are not being overwhelmed.

Figure 17 – Student maker space at NewSchool, Berlin, Germany

3. Personal, Professional and Sectoral Impact

Personal Impact

I found it fascinating on a personal level that entirely different cultures and communities share a common understanding of the challenges of engaging learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although I visited sites that had vastly different approaches to engagement each one of them agreed that it can be a challenging yet fulfilling space to work in. Some of the challenges I could resonate with were young people not being ready to learn, difficulty finding stable funding, challenges overcoming administrative hurdles to allow for program flexibility and engaging with industry. In many instances I felt like I already knew these people and could relate to them immediately even though I came from the other side of the world. Perhaps the most powerful impact was that I saw first-hand successful programs working in a very progressive space that could, in my opinion, be transferred to the Australian context and have positive results.

Taking my young family also opened my eyes up to broader social services and educational settings too. I visited some incredible child care centres, playgrounds and kindergartens, some that even hosted international chefs and catered restaurant style meals. This enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the social context in which young people live and helped me relate better to them in a broader sense.

Professional Impact

Professionally there is already many individuals, schools and other learning communities undertaking learning journeys of their own weaving their work into the patchwork quilt of education and having a positive impact. I feel the work I am doing is just another square of the patchwork quilt and there is still plenty of work to be done.

Professionally I feel I have grown as a learner and will be better equipped as a teacher in the future due to seeing universal characteristics of learning and engagement. For example, students need to feel safe and respected to unleash their creativity and become motivated whether online or otherwise.

Since returning I have had the opportunity to talk with many people in my sector about my experiences and in turn synthesise the learning. I have met with peers working in the not-for-profit sector who run programs aged at early school leavers, spoken to VET trainers about new applications of blended learning, chatted with members of a school council who have experience in transferring international ideas into working applications in Australia and also spoken with students about ways we could better cater to their needs.

This Fellowship has added to my research and past experience giving me a deeper understanding of engagement using innovative practices while my current position is giving me the opportunity to share this learning to a wide audience.

Figure 18 – 'Talent' workspace at NewSchool

Sectoral Impact

The impact I hope to achieve for the education sector is influencing principals, policy makers, local councils and governments and to expand their understanding of the possibilities of alternative learning environments, think outside the box and implement innovative programs that give everyone a solid chance at receiving the best education available.

An education system that supports disadvantaged young people to have the same opportunity as everyone else is equitable, fair and democratic. Yet in many instances, despite everyone's best efforts more and more students are falling between the cracks and ending up disengaged, disadvantaged and disenchanted. An example of this equitable approach can be seen in higher education where flexibility is available to cater for varied student needs. If you have a young family, work commitments or are isolated geographically there are still a plethora of options to keep you engaged in your studies. However, in a mainstream school, if a young person is faced with a traumatic event, illness or other hardship and they cannot attend school there is little in the way of a sufficient flexible option for them to stay connected with their schooling.

Across the sector there are common frustrations around the inability to provide a disengaged student an appropriate level of educational support. I have seen teachers printing out worksheets and handing them to case managers to pass on to students as a last-ditch attempt to keep young people engaged and this is simply not good enough. Schools, local councils and support agencies usually work together in the best interest of the young person to employ reengagement strategies and monitor the situation. For example, the Local Learning and Employment Network can work with the education provider to offer an outreach program, or the council may offer a range of wellbeing services or short-term programs. However, during this critical period where the young person is disengaging from education there is no teaching and learning strategy commonly used that helps the young person stay on track with their studies.

My peers and colleagues, and indeed the sector can benefit from this research as it presents a best practice approach that can help them in their work. If the approaches can be adapted locally and learner engagement in the VET sector increases, then the entire community will benefit.

4. Recommendations and Considerations

Figure 19 – Strategic Planning at iScoil

Considerations

Comparing education initiatives from around the world presents many challenges. This report acknowledges that it is not as simple as replicating a best practice site here in Australia as each setting will have its own set of intricacies and nuances. These nuances need to be understood in order to serve the young people's best interests and provide them with a purposeful and meaningful education.

Place based solutions are always preferable to off-the-shelf neatly packaged educational approaches. They meet the specific needs of the learners and consider the socio-political, economic and educational needs of the targeted cohort. If a new idea, approach or innovation is to be introduced from another context care must be taken to ensure that a complete replication of that approach is not implemented into existing configurations as there is often interconnected factors that if not carefully considered, can have a detrimental effect on the learners. For example, introducing high stakes testing into a space of disadvantaged learners who are already under significant stress outside of their schooling, does not give an accurate assessment of their numeracy and literacy, rather it can wreak havoc with the learner's wellbeing and future experience of education.

Johns (2017) reaffirms the point in his report Empowering Positive Post-School Transitions, the ABCs of 'College for all':

> Educators should explore methods of teaching that create deep learning experiences and resist the urge to just 'teach to tests'. This is particularly important in an age of standardised testing as the key measure of progress - not just for students but also for professionals and schools. (Johns, 2017, p. 5.)

Similarly implementing any educational approach that is working well internationally may not work locally. What is required is translating the best components of that international best practice, critical evidence-based analysis of its merits and pitfalls and a careful consideration of the new education landscape it is going to serve.

In terms of online learning it is noted that the gold standard of education is face-to-face with an education professional in a collaborative and supportive environment. When we are faced with young people not attending school however, such as school refusal, it is vital to have another option for the young person and it is in this space that online learning can, if implemented carefully, be a powerful learning tool. This not only allows for continuity in the young person's learning but also as a redirection tool back into mainstream education and in turn mainstream society.

The recommendations below all come with the caveat that before they are implemented into a particular setting, there needs to be a carefully considered feasibility study and further research. Furthermore, it is recommended that approaches are first piloted.

Figure 20 - Learning while at a community Blended Learning Centre in Co. Longford, Ireland.

Recommendations

New ways of thinking – taking the plunge

By far the most striking factor of the sites of best practice visited is that they all radically changed their educational approach to suit the students' needs and situation, rather than having the students adapt to their systems. These adaptations went beyond changing the timetable or offering elective classes based on students interests and included: situating the school in proximity to industry, using the neighbourhood and community members as integral components of the curriculum, and offering blended and online learning options to bring learning to those who could not bring themselves to the school.

To achieve this there is a focus on what is working, rather than what is not working. If young people are being engaged by technology and their devices, then the engagement strategy may be using their devices as a platform to teach from.

Likewise, the learner's voice must be at the centre of the approach in terms of curriculum, school structure and even human resources. Developing authentic curriculum based on student interests is a consistent part of the sites visited and it creates a relevance for the students that motivate them to succeed.

Self paced - a critical component

Feedback from young people and parents consistently mentioned the huge benefits of the course of study being self paced. Not having to compete amongst other students in a race to complete work in a finite timeline greatly reduces the young person's stress and anxiety. This is followed with positive reinforcement when work is completed and renews confidence in their ability. This works bothways as students will also disengage when they complete the work quickly and are waiting for others to catch up. Allowing a young person to take control of their learning and learn at their own pace is recommended.

A more meaningful certificate — aligning with employability

A powerful engagement strategy employed by the Street College is having the opportunity to have your unique skill set and experiences recognised in your individualised diploma based on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. This means that everything the student engages in is relevant and cumulates towards their goal of employment. Furthermore, this individualised diploma allows potential employers to have a far clearer understanding of the young person's interests, skills and competencies.

Comparing this with a current high school certificate which stipulates a graded score against an area of study, often in traditional subjects not specifically aligned to employability skills or industry, or the Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking (ATAR), the approach of an individualised diploma offers an innovative solution to both graduates and employers. It is recommended to introduce a similar certificate as an alternative to the current year senior secondary certificate.

High Quality Teachers - a no brainer

Regardless of the educational setting where the learning was taking place, all sites of best practice recognise the core attributes of successful teaching and learning that result in engagement. Firstly, the teacher has to form a strong learning relationship that challenges the learner. This relationship is underpinned by an authentic belief in the learner being able to achieve their goals if challenged and given the chance. Secondly, the teacher must give regular effective feedback providing information about errors and misdirection, not just positive feedback, and be there when the learner needs them to keep the momentum of learning going. Thirdly, the teacher needs to be a highly competent and actively passionate professional that holds deep knowledge of their content area and welcomes making errors as part of the learning process. After all, as John Hattie (2012) states in Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning "Teachers are among the most powerful influences in learning."

Real life learning settings - as much as possible

The physical proximity of a school in relation to sources of employment is not usually considered when planning a new school. In many instances this is not feasible as there may not be an appropriate site and education is aimed at broader goals than just working at the local businesses. However, the benefits of students undertaking real life learning tasks amongst authentic businesses can give the students their first taste of employment and they see the relevance of their study. If the school's focus is on developing entrepreneurial skills it can create a reputation that results in many businesses favouring the school's graduates. Smaller, industry targeted learning settings are recommended.

Improved online learning options - a must

What became glaringly obvious during the fellowship research in Victoria was the lack of a consistent, supportive and flexible educational approach for the young people who are only attending education settings inconsistently at best. To cater to these young people, it is recommended to design, develop and implement a fully supported online currilculum that allows continuity for learners who are transitioning between education services, suffering from circumstances that may prevent them from attending school whether that be illness, anxiety or trauma for instance.

To support the young person, online mentors and tutors could be assigned to the student for the period of time that the student is not attending school. The tutors develop curriculum based on the young person's interest and level and work with them to ensure their schooling is continuing while giving them a sense of achievement and stability during this otherwise tumultuous time. The mentors act as a wellbeing support and liaise with the tutors and students throughout.

This online program could be administered centrally with mentors and tutors being sourced from the broader educational landscape of professionals as occurs through higher education presently.

The technology required already exists in free open source software such as Moodle and can run on lightweight hardware such as any mobile device or average community centre desktop computer. This approach does not require the commercialisation of education through buying into high cost ever evolving technology. There is software already developed that could be used for this purpose however it would require the implementation of the mentor/tutor communication functionality.

Unintentionally the young person will be learning to use information communication technology aiding in further study and preparing them for the requirements of many jobs. Recognising that TAFE and Higher Education providers offer an increasingly online suite of courses, and that the future workplaces utilise communication technology as well, means transitioning into the next life stage of either further study or employment is made easier due to the young person already acquiring many of the necessary tech skills.

Having the ability to pick up where you are at in terms of academic achievement, and be able to continue this regardless of your physical location, including having the same mentor and tutors, reduces the amount of change the young person is experiencing in their life, and therefore reduces the negative impacts. Finally, the opportunity for this online curriculum to be integrated with mainstream, alternative or other schools and even other social services is enormous.

Education Hubs - an opportunity waiting to happen

The development of an online curriculum that incorporates trained and qualified mentors and specialist content developers has the benefit of the student being able to study anywhere they feel safe and have access to a computer with an internet connection. Utilising community centres that are already offering youth services whether they be for employment, wellbeing or recreation as education hubs, gives the young person an interim option to study and stay on track with their academic pathway, while benefitting from the other services on offer.

When a student is refusing to go to school the reasons can be complex but often overcome by going to an educational setting with fewer students and fewer teachers. As mentioned before the benefits of social inclusion are strongly linked with attaining educational milestones and this solution provides that opportunity in a small, safe and convenient setting. Incorporating an online education model into a community centre allows for a blended learning approach enhancing interaction and collaboration.

Teacher Training - be effective in an online space

It is critical to acknowledge the difference of learning through a blended or fully online approach compared to being face-to-face with a teacher in the classroom, and then train accordingly. As mentioned before in 'considerations' it is preferable for a young person to be face-to-face with an educational professional. However, if an online option is deemed appropriate as the learner is not consistently attending school then it is recommended that that online option be run by highly competent and qualified staff.

Ensuring that tutors or content specialists are trained in developing content considering instructional design principles, that is in a way that increases the engagement and retention of information in an online format, is critical. Furthermore, online mentors would require qualifications in either counselling, psychology or equivalent. All staff would need to be proficient is utilising the chosen learner management system as well as being trained in child protection, cyber safety and an appropriate level information technology.

Claire Rasmussen's (2016) report "Improving the quality, capability and status of the VET teacher workforce" could provide answers to implementing a successful training model national wide that saw teachers trained in digital technology skills.

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6. Appendices

Appendix 1

Discussion Guide: Learners

Objective: To understand how the learners are engaged with the content, the tutors, mentors each other and how they experience their course, and what impact it has on them.

1. INTRODUCTION + PERMISSION (2m)
Introductory conversation to make participants feel comfortable. Explanation of the project and reason for today's conversation. Go over the explanatory statement.   Ask for consent for the interview and to take notes and photos to help us remember.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (5m)
1.   Age: 10-12,   13-14,   15-16,   17-18,   19+

2.   Level of study:

3.   Previous study level obtained:

4.   Time out of mainstream schooling:

5.   Do you attend a Blended Centre?

6.   Time/duration in the program:

7.   Study goal:

8.   How did you hear about the program?

9.   Would you recommend the program?

3. THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE (20m)
1.   Tell me why you've come to this school, and a little about your past.

2.   I know from your teachers you learn online, tell me about this? What do you like, why, what don't you like, why?

3.   What do you find challenging? Why?

4.   Are there parts of the online study which makes you procrastinate? Which ones and why?

5.   When you are working with others online, what is it like? Why?

6.   When you are working on your own online, tell me about that. Tell me about the structure of your study, are you deciding what to do next or are you guided?

7.   Tell me about the Moodle site where the teachers upload your work.

8.   How do you view the role of your teachers in terms of the learning tools you use, can they help you with the online component of work sufficiently?

9.   Imagine a 'Wish granting fairy' has come along to help you reach your goal, what would you wish for?

4. CLOSE (3m)

Ask the participant if they have any questions. Thank them for their cooperation.

Appendix 2

Discussion Guide: Tutors

Objective: To understand how the Tutors/teachers/ support the learners, their role, their responsibilities, their challenges and their motivation.

TIMELINE about 30 minutes

1.   Introduction & Permission - 2m

2.   Demographic Questionnaire 5m

3.   The Tutor Experience - 20m

4.   Close - 3m

 1. INTRODUCTION + PERMISSION (2m)

Introductory conversation to make participant feel comfortable. Explanation of the project and reason for today's conversation. Go over explanatory statement.   Ask for consent for the interview and to take notes and photos to help us remember.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (5m)

Age: 18 – 25,   26 - 34, 35-44,   45- 54,   55+

Qualifications:

Time/Duration working in the program:

Previous experience:

Number of students supporting:

What time/when do you work (business hours or otherwise etc.):

Is this your sole job or do you also work elsewhere?

3. THE TUTOR EXPERIENCE (20m)

1.   Tell me why you've come to work here and a little about your past.

2.   Tell me about your role. What do you like, why, what don't you like, why?

3.   What do you find challenging? Why?

4.   What interests you most? Why?

5.   Tell me about the Learner Management System where the students interact with you.

6.   How do you choose learning tools? How do you evaluate their effectiveness?

7.   When you are working with others online, what is it like? Why? Do you collaborate?

8.   Imagine a 'Wish granting fairy' has come along grant you any wish (job related) you want, what would you wish for?

4. CLOSE (3m)

Ask the participant if they have any questions. Thank them for their cooperation.