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I would firstly like to thank my Board of Trustees for allowing me the opportunity to take a sabbatical and to my community for supporting me. To Kelly Wilson my supportive Release Teacher and to Diane Walker who was my Relieving Principal for term 4, they both literally held the school together following the big quake. Finally, a big thank you to the Ministry of Education for providing Sabbaticals for Principals and Teachers.

Raising boys achievement through the use of EOTC

Rationale and Background Information

Being a sole charge principal in a rural environment lends itself nicely to bringing learning alive through the use of education outside of the classroom and exploring our local environment and area. Over the last five years I have been based in a lovely rural school inland from Kaikoura with a high proportion of my students being boys; boys who loved to be out on the farm, hunting or just being outside exploring. I have also been brought up with the outdoors and have a passion for hunting, horses, animals and just getting out there and doing it, this led to a happy synergy with my students. I encourage my students to bring their personal experiences into the classroom to write about their adventures, to read about what interests them and to start making connections to the things they have a passion for and the wider world.

I have had a pretty good run with my students being happy, motivated and developing a passion for writing. They have all, over the last few years, really started to develop as writers with great personal voices and plenty of gruesome detail when they talk about their adventures. However, they still often completely forget about expanding their writing, struggle to get their thoughts down on the page and surface features often go out the window. My challenge and thought is how do I now help them to develop their characters and create a story plot that has an outcome. Orally they can tell amazing stories but when it comes to writing them down it becomes shortened and rushed and the most interesting points become lost.

Professional learning activity

Is to visit other schools and see what motivates and engages students with their learning but with a particular focus on boy's engagement with writing.

Purpose of the sabbatical

My inquiry is to look at other teaching practices and see how other teachers and educators have engaged boys in learning.

My Report

I first met up with Dr Sharyn Goldstein from Canterbury University when she ran an educational science camp in Kaikoura through the *Curious Minds programme*. I then invited her to speak with the Marlborough Principals about her experiences.

Sharyn started up a programme to engage disengaged students through science and technology exploration. Her philosophy is to use her skills, knowledge and expertise to bring academics and disengaged students together to learn and share experiences together. To help break down the barriers of the academic world and open students minds to new possibilities. It allows students to

learn outside of a normal school environment and allows for practical hands on learning. (Presentation 9th June 2016 to MPA principals).

Interview with Dave Pauly:

Principal of Richmond View, Dave Pauly believes in allowing students to learn through exploration and to follow their passion. He has started a programme for disengaged boys '*The Kids Shed*'. Their first project was to rebuild go-carts. Through this initiative he has seen a change in the boys attitude to school and a willingness to learn. I had the opportunity to speak with this group of boys, who were confident, charming young men who had found a passion for learning.

The questions and the boys' responses:

How has this programme helped your writing?

- "I used to be negative about writing but now I feel positive about writing".
- "The activities are based around what we are learning".
- "We get to go out and explore".
- "I used to find school boring but it is now more fun, I get my work done now and I have more success, I can now write 4 pages".
- "Good - it improved my writing".
- "Makes me look forward to writing".

When you doing learning outside of the classroom, how does it help with your writing?

- "I learn about things we use in everyday life and how they work, so I can now fix things at home and solve problems".
- "I learnt how a piston works and we used science to help explain this".

How does your teacher support your writing?

- "They give me hints to put in my writing".
- "I can write short pieces and they remind me to put full stops".
- "Gives me ideas".
- "Vocabulary of the parts are labelled".

What motivates you to write stories?

- "Hands on learning and being creative".
- "Writing for a purpose - we wrote a letter to the local fishing shop asking if they could sponsor their fishing club they wanted to start, they were struggling and another student came and helped them to write it".

What is the best story you have written and why?

- "A narrative about getting my helicopter licence - my teacher told me to write down lots of ideas and I chose the helicopter story".
- "About a space car that explores space and there was a problem when the engine fell off - I love cars and space and working with the motor inspired me".
- "A narrative hunting story - I have a passion for hunting and love the outdoors.
- "A fun story about spaghetti - we had to describe spaghetti without using the word spaghetti and a story about diving into water - we used lots of descriptive words".

What also helps you to be a better writer?

- "Using a computer or other devices to write my stories".

The '*Kids Shed*' that Dave has initiated at his school is based around collaboration and shared responsibility between the two teachers who are running the current programme. The teachers do shared planning and reflection around the learning that is happening and where the learning will head. The teachers consider the boys interests to get a spark of interest. The students do inquiry based learning Monday to Wednesday, then on Thursday do the practical hands on learning and on Friday they revisit what they have learnt.

Photographs are taken so the teachers can see what is happening and use these to support the student learning back in the classroom.

On my adventures through Scandinavia, Czech Republic and the U.K. I was privileged enough to have the opportunity to visit local schools and spend time with amazing teaching professionals and their fabulous students.

While in Denmark we stayed with friends on an island called Endelave. It is only 4000 acres in size with a population of 250 people and is an hours ferry ride from the mainland. I was invited to visit the local school and spend some time with the students. At Endelave School there are 7 students from 6 to 14 years of age and 3 teachers and a teacher aide. The similarities between my school and theirs were unreal. Due to the small roll and the fact that the class is made up often of siblings they too had the same issues of students becoming frustrated with each other but also the challenge of keeping up an exciting learning programme. The teachers are always looking at stimulating the students learning and exposing them to the world outside of their island. So once a week the students and the teachers travel into Horsens on the mainland to a local school where the children are inter-graded into the larger schools classes so that they can socialise and develop relationships with other students. While the students are attending classes the teachers either take a class and teach other students or do some extra training to provide stimulation also for the teachers.

At the school they have a room which is dedicated to creating things whether it is making things out of timber, doing art and crafts or exploring technology. It is about inspiring creativity. The senior students had been exploring world issues and looking at how they could help and thinking of solutions for the problems the world is facing.

The students all have access to technology which includes laptops and iPads. The students work independently while the teacher works with individuals or small groups.

I also visited Barrit School and was shown around the school by Maria Bjerg who is the English teacher at the school. It was interesting to learn that the children begin learning English in year one and German from about year 4.

Maria was interested that as primary school teacher in New Zealand, we teach all subjects where in Denmark they all specialise and may only teach a few areas. So the students may move to different classrooms, to different teachers, 2 or 3 times a day depending on their time table. At Barrit School they also do a topic week, once or twice a term.

Prior to starting my sabbatical I had started to do some reading about raising boy's achievement. One book I read (*Breaking through the barriers to boy's achievement*) I found was particularly interesting which was written by Garry Wilson an Educational Researcher from the UK. So I contacted Garry and arranged to meet up with him while I was in the UK and he also invited me to attend a teacher only day that he was presenting at.

Key Points from our meeting and conference:

- Learning through outdoors and active play is important to boy's development.
- Gender of the teacher is not relevant to boy's learning. It is the quality of the teaching which is the most important.
- Breaking through the gender barrier by empowering boys and help them get back on track if they are going the wrong way by giving them responsibilities such as; teaching kids at feeder schools, through the use of role play to model good behaviour, doing activities together like making pancakes, using the older students as mentors for maths and writing.
- Getting dads involved.
- Getting boys enrolled at the library - develop an interest in books at an early age.
- Meals around the dinner table - lots of oral conversations.
- Stop negatively labelling and stereotyping boys use positive slogans, e.g. "Boys will be brilliant". Boys need to see themselves in a positive light. Once boy has a negative label they feel they have to live up to that reputation.
- Is there a gender balance.
- Praise all work!
- Boys need more praise to counter all the negative they have had.
- Sleep is vital and kids need two hours down time before bed - no screen time
- We learn best when we teach others. You will remember up to 90%, when listening to others you remember 10%, and when discussing things you remember 50%, so teaching others and oral discussion is very important for learning.
- Boys want and like constancy.
- Boys need short term rewards, short term goals and short term targets.
- With Secondary Schools they found that positive phone calls home worked best with boys to encourage positive behaviour and engagement at school. Also by celebrating success at home brings about positive conversations in the home.
- Stop forcing boys to read and write and use fine motor skills before they are physically and mentally able.
- Don't get hung up on boys handwriting provide them with a variety of writing tools that work for them.
- Value what boys bring to the table.
- Outdoor environment needs to be different to indoor environment.
- Parents are money rich but time poor, they need to get off their phones and spend time with their children.
- Boys biggest barrier to learning is not being able to reflect on what they have learned. Reflection needs to begin in the early years by sharing what they did at ECE or at school.
- The plenary is the most important part of the lesson for boys
- Social class impacts on vocabulary.
- Boys need to see a sense of purpose with activities, especially writing.
- Teachers need to teach with enthusiasm.
- To improve writing boys need to do an activity first before writing.
- Need a balance of fiction and non-fiction texts.
- Don't make boys copy work from books or the board.

As you can see from the key bullet points most of his suggestions are a common sense approach, about building relationships, valuing the student and making learning relevant and purposeful.

Also while I was in the UK I was invited to visit and spend time in 3 classrooms at Bronte House in Apperly Bridge, West Yorkshire. I meet with the head Simon Dunn and talk with him about the school's curriculum. They follow the guide lines of the U.K. Curriculum and use the "Chris Quigley programme" which is a topic based approach to teaching. <http://www.chrisquigley.co.uk/>

I spoke with the Head of Curriculum, Fiona Cohen and she remarked how English through the topic based approach brought interest, motivation and made learning relevant. Students still had the freedom to bring in their own interests. They found the programme a good stimulus for writing as they could write what they knew about as the writing part of the topic they were learning about.

I was privileged to spend time in a year 4 and 5 class observing writing.

The year 4's were focusing on fantasy writing and had been reading 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' and studying the style of the writing each day the students did activities around composing their own fantasy stories. Their teacher was wanting their students to develop the plot in their fantasy story, they found that the students did great introductions and character descriptions but lost focus when it came to writing the plot. So the teacher had set up a template to support the structure of the story development and each day worked on a small chunk unpacking the students ideas, pulling out vocabulary and supporting the students writing developing their paragraphs.

Later, I observed a writing lesson in a year 5 class. Their topic based theme was polar opposites comparing deserts to Arctic Poles. So, I had a great discussion with the class about what I would need to take with me when I go up to Jokkmokk in Sweden (which is above the Arctic Circle) when I go dog sledding. They had a great understanding of the best types of materials I would need such as wool and down as materials to keep warm. They had previously in class watched a video of Bear Grylls surviving in the Sahara Desert and were brainstorming the key ideas from that clip. The students then had to write an opening statement about survival in a desert.

In each of the classes I observed, I also had an opportunity to ask the students some questions, below are their responses.

Student interview responses:

What helps you to write good stories?

- Reading lots of books
- Practicing
- Structure
- Talking it through
- Brainstorming
- Joining up key words to make sentences.

What do you like about writing?

- Interesting as you can are things up
- Use your imagination
- Finding new words
- Just enjoy it as I can use my imagination
- It's an adventure
- You can write about lots of different things, like fantasy and make it fun

What motivates you to write?

- Being successful
- Getting better each time
- Leads to success - I could become a successful author and make lots of money

What might help you to write better stories?

- Write smaller chunks (I get a sore hand when we have to write too much)

- Type it rather than write it by hand

How does your teacher help you with your writing?

- Gives us starting ideas
- Uses pictures to help us form ideas in our head
- Helps us paint a picture in our head

Visiting the Czech Republic:

When we were in Czech Republic a teaching friend of ours invited us to his A level English class as guests. The students had to ask us questions in English to find out about us and to also help them practice their English conversation skills before their exams.

It was fascinating to have the opportunity to speak with 19 year old students and find out about what they thought about their education system, they were shocked when I told them that most students had access to laptops and i-pads and that we had wireless internet throughout the school as these were things they didn't have access to and very much wanted. While there, music started playing through the loud speaker system to indicate the end of the period. I asked the students about it and they just laughed saying it was kind of a fun way to get our attention, much better than bells ringing.

An interview with Lars Svendsen From Nim School:

I was invited to speak with Lars Svendsen the Principal and Nim School and visit the different classroom with my guide and interpreter Benjamin (A wonderful year 6 student).

I started my day at Nim School with an assembly at 7.45am then spent time with Lars discussing his school and boys achievement. The school day is from 7.45am till 1.45pm to fit in with parents who work in Horsens the nearest city.

The school has a focus on math, reading and writing and they use standardised testing. This is driven mainly by the local municipal body in Horsens and the school's needs. Each school district has different foci and approaches.

Wellbeing of students is also a new focus. The students complete an annual survey and the data is reported back to the municipal and from the data the school strategic plan.

Lars said that one of their issues is around boys and their learning, he felt there was a lack of oral interaction and social guidance. He found that 80% referrals for extra support for learning or behaviour were boys.

The school has a preschool attached so a strategy to ensure boys are ready for school is to work closely with a transition plan. Schools in Denmark have 3 intakes a year so the teachers work with the parents and pre-school staff to determine if the students are ready to start school. If a student is confident and has the skills they may start school 3 months earlier or if they feel a child needs more time they will start them 3 months later.

Once a year 0 has been at school for 6 to 8 weeks, the preschool teacher comes to the school and interviews the student on how they found it transitioning to primary. They use the information to take back to the preschool and reflect on how prepared the students are and if they need to add anything to their programme.

The preschool and primary work closely to see what skills the students need to be competent at primary school so the child feels confident starting. They are now trailing this same interview method with the secondary system.

Their goal is to have consistency of expectations from preschool to secondary.

What ideas I will bring to my own practice:

- Have a balance between learning that take place outside of the classroom and within the classroom and allow my students to learn through exploration.
- Lots of oral language, discussion time and reflection time.
- Make sure learning is purposeful and meaningful and that it is relevant to my students.
- Ensure student work has an audience.
- Ensure positive relationships are established between myself, the students and their families. Know my students well.
- Ensure students have a voice and have input into their own learning and progress.
- Ensure a transparent and consistent behaviour programme.
- Ensure a gender balance in my classroom.
- Set up learning programmes, which are based around my student's interests and needs.
- Set up my classroom to allow collaborative and hands on learning.
- Keep up the energy and positivity.

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- Dr Sharyn Goldstein from Canterbury University

Books, which I read as part of my learning journey:

- Breaking through the barriers to boys achievement, by Gary Wilson
- Raising boys achievement in primary schools, by Molly Warrington and Mike Younger
- Educating boys, by Michael Irwin
- Boys adrift, by Leonard Sax