

*Inclusive Learning Education*

*Primary Principal's Sabbatical  
Leave*

*Term 3 2010*

*Carol Pilcher  
St Teresa's School  
Featherston*

# *Primary Principal Sabbatical Report*

*Term Three 2010*

Carol Pilcher  
Principal  
St Teresa's School  
Featherston  
South Wairarapa

**Focus:** To develop English literacy skills in a motivating, innovative and rewarding learning environment, which supports teachers, teacher aides and students.

## **Purpose and Acknowledgements**

My sabbatical leave gave me time for reflection and an opportunity to research ideas on how best we can (St Teresa's School) meet the needs of all students in our literacy programmes – from those who are ESOL, 'at risk' and enrichment.

This time enabled me to research, read and collate information and attend the Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference which was held in May 2010 in Brisbane, Australia.

Many thanks to:

- The Ministry of Education for approving my application for sabbatical leave.
- The St Teresa's School Board of Trustees for endorsing my application for sabbatical leave.
- The St Teresa's School staff and community for their support.

## **Executive Summary:**

Attending this conference exposed me to the many different processes, systems and technologies that can be used to engage students who struggle at school due to their disabilities in literacy. It enabled me to gain confidence and become competent at developing and implementing programmes that will assist those children who have been identified on the Barriers to Learning folder – many who have little or no extra funding to support their learning.

My confidence in sharing my ‘new’ learning to teachers supported them in developing the necessary knowledge and strategies to successfully teach and engage these children that would ensure progress.

The conference focused on strategies for successfully using ‘inclusive learning technologies’ to advance independent achievement for ALL – in whatever form that achievement may present itself. As our school mission statement is “Act justly, Love tenderly, Walk humbly” including these children and their families into our school culture is a top priority.

It is worth mentioning several of the keynote speakers at the conference who were high quality presenters. The five that had the most influence on enlightening me to see that we need (must) try many different way to engage, motivate and achieve success with all students were:

**Ian Bean** – is known for his work at Priory Woods School in the UK where he taught learners of all ages with a wide range of sever, profound and complex learning difficulties. Ian’s work at Priory Woods is internationally recognised as a model of best practice in the use of ICT. Ian has in-depth knowledge of assistive technology and has developed novel teaching strategies to exploit the full potential of ICT. He is passionate in his belief that technology has the potential to enable and empower ALL learners providing them with rich, meaningful and personalised learning experiences.

**Dr Caroline Musselwhite** is a Speech Language Pathologist with more than 25 years experience working with children with learning disabilities. She has written books, lectured at universities, and is a dynamic and inspirational presenter whose enthusiasm for her work is motivational. She comes from USA and was so willing to share her wealth of knowledge.

**Dr Gretchen Hanser** is a school-based occupational therapist and assistive technology specialist in USA and has developed many innovative solutions for children with learning disabilities. She believes that these children should be using assistive technology regularly for their learning.

**Chris Abbott** is the Disability Advisor and Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator for the Department of Education and Professional Studies at King’s College in London. He is the author of many publications and his hands on approach and the sharing of his knowledge was extremely beneficial.

**E.A. Draffan** is best known for her work with print impaired students. She is an energetic campaigner for these children as well as providing staff development throughout the country focusing on areas such as dyslexia.

### **Background and rationale:**

By attending this conference I was able to:

- Develop programmes for students – including researching appropriate, valuable and affordable resources.
- Feedback my research at staff meetings
- Develop a staff handbook for assisting teachers and teacher aides
- Share this new knowledge with Principal’s and management teams

- Share my findings with the local RTLB's and Support agencies.

### **The professional and personal benefits of attending this conference were:**

Due to the school having a high percentage of children with diagnosed (as well as undiagnosed) learning difficulties, many of these children do not generate any form of support e.g. teacher aide or learning support funding, apart from the ORRS funded children. Attending this conference enabled me to see what else could be offered to these children to engage and assist them with their learning, as well as the benefits to teachers, teacher aides and parents/caregivers.

Finding suitable and appropriate resources, a variety of methods and processes to engage and make a difference to these students learning was an important issue for our school.

The schools strategic plan has two goals that were strengthened by me attending this conference -

- To implement strategies and systems in order to overcome barriers to learning
- To provide opportunities to explore ICT that enhances learning and teaching

For myself it was an opportunity for me to network with other educationalists and to see what 'else' is out there "in the wider world" for these children. It is also an interest of mine, as I believe all children are capable of learning and achieving at their level. It has enabled me to assist teachers who often find this area of teaching these children frustrating.

### **Findings**

I have included some of the slides from one of the PowerPoint's of my feedback which highlights the extended learning that I have acquired. It was motivating, stimulating and my passion in this area has made a difference to the way we organise and plan at St Teresa's for all children but in particular those children with learning differences. We ensure that these children have explicit and focused plans that enable them to be engaged in their own learning, whether it is academic, social, physical or emotional, and that they are supported by a variety of appropriate resources.

Personally, I have been enriched, invigorated and extended by this sabbatical. My new understandings and knowledge has increased my resolve to continue to work and research for children with learning differences so that they can and will meet with success.

The people that I have been fortunate enough to meet and the support networks established during this sabbatical will nurture me going forward. This is not the end but a new beginning.

### **Key slides**

## Finding the key to learning..

- Innovative
- The learner- teacher & pupil
- Passion and desire to make a difference
- Try- persist- modify- try - persist

Think back to your schools days - what is different.....is it adequate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner?

Physical - academic - social - content - political

## Literacy needs to become a habit

*A Habit is something you repeat and repeat  
Like saying 'hello' to the people you meet  
Some habits are good; some habits are bad  
Some make you happy; some make you sad*

*Some habits are noisy like cracking your knuckles  
Some habits are gross like picking your nose  
Once you have a habit it's very hard to lose  
So be very careful of the ones you choose*

## Writing

To teach literacy we must go beyond the single words

**First...teach them to write**

Centre on the child's interest.....  
.....understanding the learner

## NZ Research– Wenden 1985

**“Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime”.**

Applied to the literacy teaching and learning areas, this proverb might be interpreted to mean that if students are provided with answers, the immediate problem is solved. But if they are taught the strategies to work out the answers for themselves, they are empowered to manage their own learning.

# Colour

Research has shown that colours can affect not just our frame of mind but our behaviour and thought patterns.

