

PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT, 2015

What Schools Do To Support Students Who Find Reading A Challenge

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Sabbatical Time Frame: Term 2, 2015

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the Wesley Intermediate School Board of Trustees for approving this sabbatical and to: Jason Murray & Lou Reddy, the Management Team, and to all the staff for supporting my leave.

Thanks also to the principals, and senior leaders, and wider members of the teaching profession who were willing to share their time, knowledge and practices and to engage in professional dialogue around supporting students who find reading challenging.

I also thank the NZEI, TeachNZ and MOE for supporting the sabbatical leave process. As well as having five weeks working on this assignment, I also appreciate the refreshment aspect of the sabbatical leave, and the fact that energy levels can be renewed.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Diane, who has always supported me, and who acted as my photographer, note taker and co-driver while visiting schools outside Auckland.

Purpose:

The purpose of my sabbatical was to engage with staff in other schools in regard to their practices to support students who find reading challenging, and how it compares to what we do at Wesley Intermediate School. Two key areas I was particularly interested was (a) how are schools using teacher aides to support these students, and (b) what resources/programmes are schools implementing to support these students

Rationale and Background Information:

Wesley Intermediate School is a Decile One school in Central Auckland. Approximately 80% of our students are from Pacific Island or Maori ethnicity with another 10% coming from refugee or migrant families. Throughout the past ten years we have tried to support our students who find reading a challenge by having a withdrawal Rainbow Reading programme, plus other withdrawal programmes, ie. Danks Davis (for dyslexic students), Reading Eggs, Headworks, Lexile Reading Programme, and Reading Together programmes, (training approximately twenty four parents). At the start of 2015 we made a few changes ie. (a) having teacher aides work alongside teachers in classrooms using the STEPS Programme and running a withdrawal ESOL Programme. While we have seen a number of students make accelerated progress while using these programmes, I wanted to find out what other schools were doing to support these types of students.

Activities Undertaken:

- Visited with staff from ten schools in the North Island in regard to their practices to support students who find reading challenging.
- Visited with staff from three schools in the South Island in regard to their practices to support students who find reading challenging.
- Refreshed by travelling to London & Europe to meet up with friends and relatives
- Refreshed by attending wedding of friend's son in Queenstown.

Methodology:

1. Visited schools

Schools were identified through roll size and decile rating, local colleagues and other personnel I had met at conferences, and staff from schools that had visited our school while on previous sabbaticals.

I emailed principals explaining my sabbatical purpose and rationale. Thirteen of the eighteen schools contacted responded positively.

2. Reflections

I spaced the visits out so it allowed me time to reflect on each visit in relation to practices in my own school.

Findings:

During my time visiting other schools I found most schools working in similar ways to ours. I was very impressed to see principals and teachers showing so much passion, enthusiasm and commitment to their charges. All schools had their own character, and all schools were totally dedicated to improving the learning and well being of all students. All staff were more than willing to share their knowledge, resources and opinions.

While visiting schools principals and staff shared the different challenges facing them and their students. A number of people spoke about the 'rigorous' expectations regarding accelerating student progress, however the people making those expectations didn't want to consider the fact that the health and pastoral needs of students was making this very difficult. Some principals also spoke about the stress related to these rigorous expectations and the lack of support for all of the other daily tasks that they have to perform in the school.

How schools were using Teacher Aides

I was really interested in finding out how teacher aides were used to help students who find reading a challenge in the schools visited, as we had only recently moved from having teacher aides in withdrawal spaces to working alongside teachers in the classroom.

Out of the thirteen schools visited...

- Three used Teacher Aides only in withdrawal situations
- One used Teacher Aides only in classroom settings
- Two did not have any Teacher Aides at all

- Seven used Teacher Aides both in the classroom and in withdrawal spaces

Teacher Aides were used for...

- ESOL & Bilingual Support (3 schools)
- Supporting students in the class who found reading a challenge (9 schools)
- Withdrawal Programmes ie Rainbow Reading (9 schools)
- Other programmes ie. Brain Gym, Kidz Therapy (2 schools)
- Students with Special Learning Needs (3 schools)

Note 1: The three schools who used Teacher Aides to support ESOL students, Bilingual students, and students with Special Learning Needs were using MOE funded positions.

Note 2: Some schools were using RTL/RLit funding, to financially support teacher aide positions in classrooms and withdrawal Programmes. Some schools were using Operations Grant funds to employ these teacher aides.

Note 3: The other programmes (ie. Brain Gym, Kidz Therapy) were funded by Operations Grant funds.

Unless a teacher aide was working one on one, (ie with a child with Special Learning Needs), all of the others worked with 4 – 6 students at one time. This ranged from 20 minutes, (with a small group of students in the classroom), through to 60 minutes (withdrawal group).

Four schools expected teacher aides to attend PLD along with the rest of the staff, however most schools had spent time training up teacher aides in their specific roles. Two schools had the STEPS Programme up and running in their schools. Training for these teacher aides were provided by RTLB.

One school had a number of volunteers supporting their reading programme. They were trained by a senior staff member to run RAP, (Reading Advancement Programme). The programme was specifically for reading mileage and volunteers were trained in Pause, Prompt, and Praise.

Some schools are expecting teacher aides to be digitally savvy, as students are working with I-Pads and Chromebooks.

Resources & Programmes schools were using

My aim was to find out what resources and programmes schools were using. A number of schools were using the Rainbow Reading Programme, and like us had added other resources to meet the individual needs of students ie. Toe by Toe for dyslexic students. However, I was quite surprised at the range of resources and programmes that were available, and believe that if time and money allowed, I would have come across even more. The area below is by no means an exhaustive list, though it does show what some schools are doing.

Five of the schools I visited were currently using the **Rainbow Reading Programme**, though only one had purchased the 'talking pens'. Rainbow Reading can be used to support students who find reading a challenge as it is a repeated reading programme. Due to the fact that it has fiction and non-fiction material, the programme does retain student interest. More information can be accessed via www.rainbowreading.co.nz

Five schools had previously used the **Reading Together Programme**, but four were no longer using it as MOE funding had stopped. Reading Together aims to improve students reading ability by giving parents/whanau tools to use at home while listening to/with their children. More information about Reading Together can be accessed via <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/School-initiated-supports/Reading-Together>

While only two schools were using the **STEPS Programme**, both were impressed with the results they were getting. The programme had been funded by RTLB, who also provided training. The programme has four tiers, and I observed Tier Four being used in schools visited. Tier 4 caters to learners who have moderate to high needs, (ie dyslexic, processing difficulties, and developmental delays). More information about the STEPS Programme can be accessed via <http://learningstaircase.co.nz/>

While not an actual programme **Reciprocal teaching** refers to an instructional activity in which students become the teacher in small group reading sessions. Teachers model, then help students learn to guide group discussions using four strategies: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. For more information see <http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Teacher-needs/Reviewed-resources/Reading/Comprehension/ELP-years-5-8/Reciprocal-teaching-of-reading>

Toe By Toe comes via a small red book. The programme helps students who struggle to decode or those with dyslexia. Students progress by making tiny steps, (one toe at a time). Even though the steps taken are small, students measure progress right from the first page, which improves confidence and self esteem. For more information go to <http://www.toe-by-toe.co.uk/what-is-toe-by-toe/>

I heard about the **MultiLit Programme** via one of the schools that feed students into Rotorua Boys High School. The MultiLit approach is to find out what skills students do have and which areas are cause for concern, and to then fill in their knowledge with direct, systematic and intensive teaching and/or tutoring of these skills. For more information go to <http://www.multilit.com/about/multilit-in-new-zealand/>

Quick 60 is a small group intervention programme designed to help struggling students or those students with limited English in 60 lessons or fewer. Lesson plans come with the programme and are very prescriptive, with the

instructions being explicit and systematic. For more information visit <http://www.iversenpublishing.com/>

Lexia is a structured online programme that helps students to work independently. The programme looks at developing reading skills with a focus on foundation skills that flow into fluency, listening, comprehension and vocabulary skills. The programme has an assessment system which provides data without the need for extra testing. For more information, visit <http://www.lexialearning.co.nz/>

EPIC is an individualised reading programme online similar to an ebook subscription for students. For more information see <https://www.getepic.com/>

Most teachers know about the **SRA Reading Laboratory's**. When treated as a regular part of the classroom routine, SRA offers an organized, systematic programme that improves reading skills, study habits and personal responsibility. It is best used over a short comprehensive period of time. For more information see <http://www.sreadinglabs.com/print/pages/home.php>

Reading Eggs is an online programme that offers individual one on one lessons that allows students to progress at their own pace. The programme focus is on phonics and sight words. For more information see <http://readingeggs.co.nz/>

While not strictly being a reading programme, **Brain Gym** was mentioned by three schools visited. Brain Gym aims to improve many different skills including listening, attention, memory, coordination and academic skills. It incorporates gentle physical movements to coordinate the brain and body for greater productivity and learning. For more information see <http://braingym.org.nz/>

Conclusion:

The time spent visiting schools was like a 'breath of fresh air.' Everyone was very accommodating and were willing to share their thoughts and practices. At the end of the day I felt affirmed by what I saw, and believe staff at our school are supporting these types of students in a positive manner. A number of the programmes are up and running, or have been trialed in our school. Though in saying that I did come across some resources that I had never seen before. While there are a lot of resources and programmes on offer to help students who find reading a challenge, most schools stated that academic progress still depended on the relationships that the student has with the teacher and teacher aide supporting him/her.

Most schools also stated that building community relationships is also vital to helping these students. The schools that had used the Reading Together Programme felt that this had been a positive way to get the families involved in the students learning. Three of the four schools who had stopped using this programme stated that if the MOE funding was still available they would continue running it.

The most popular programme was Rainbow Reading, and when schools were asked why they were still using this programme when there are so many other programmes on offer, all of the five schools stated words to the effect of, "We know it works."

The programme that was second on the list was the STEPS Programme. While only two schools had introduced it, most schools had heard about it, and it was on their 'to do' list to find out more information.

No matter which programme was being used, all schools spoke favourably of what they were doing and felt the students were making accelerated progress.

Future Action:

While I was on sabbatical, the STEPS Programme was introduced to our school via RTLB and SENCO. Our Assistant Principal, (who is also our SENCO) received training in Reciprocal Teaching in 2014, and is keen to implement it throughout the whole school.

On a personal note I am interested in exploring the Lexia, Quick 60 and the Multilit programmes more in depth as our school is heading towards being fully digital, and these programmes may suit that environment.

I would particularly like to thank the Principals and Staff from...

- Tauranga Intermediate School
- Otumoetai Intermediate School
- Kelburn Normal School
- Carisbrook School
- Ascot Community School
- Remarkables School
- Kedgley Intermediate School
- Te Atatu Intermediate School
- New Windsor School
- Papatoetoe West Intermediate School
- Wairau Intermediate School
- Birkdale Intermediate School
- May Road School

I want to thank you all for your time, your support and your willingness to share with me. Even though you gave me information regarding how you support your students, I also appreciated the tours of your school, and the frank and honest discussions regarding the challenges facing each individual school.