

# **Sabbatical Report**

**An investigation into, and synthesis of,  
sound pedagogy, resources and links to  
support schools in strengthening their  
literacy journey.**

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### **About the Author and School :**

I am the proud principal of Holy Cross School, a position I have held since 2006. I am committed to my own, and the school's, continuous improvement through the implementation of pedagogically sound practices.

Holy Cross School is a Year 1-8 school, with twenty eight different cultural groups represented; a large number of our students have English as an Additional Language. We have a very supportive community, including a hard-working and dedicated staff and BOT. Literacy learning has been and continues to be a key area of need for our students. We work to provide authentic, meaningful contexts for learning and implement consistent structures and practices school-wide.

### **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to express my sincere thanks for the opportunities this Sabbatical has provided. I have loved having the time to read, reflect, visit schools, talk and work with professionals and I sincerely hope that what I share will be of value to others.

I would like to acknowledge:

The Holy Cross School Board of Trustees, for wholeheartedly endorsing my application for this Sabbatical and for the support they provide, in so many areas, that allows me to carry out the complex task of leadership.

The staff of Holy Cross School, particularly to Mrs Susie Sumner who very ably stepped into the principal's role, during my absence. Thanks to Susie all the staff who took on responsibilities to ensure the smooth running of the school during this time.

Martina Tassone, Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne for giving so generously of her time, for sharing her incredible wisdom, knowledge and expertise with me and for organising and accompanying me on visits to such inspiring schools.

The schools I visited in New Zealand and Melbourne. My sincere thanks to each of the passionate, committed professionals I met, for helping deepen my knowledge and understanding of helpful practices and for sharing their journeys and experiences. Thank you to the principals, literacy leaders and staff of Waitohu School and Te Horo School in New Zealand and St John Bosco, Niddrie; St Margaret Mary's Brunswick North; Trinity Catholic School, Richmond; St Mary's, Thornbury and Flemington Primary in Melbourne, Australia.

The Ministry of Education and NZEI for enabling this project, by awarding me a TeachNZ Principal Sabbatical in Term 3, 2018. I feel so fortunate to have been given this opportunity and I look forward to sharing my learning with others and implementing further, programmes and practices that will strengthen the teaching and learning programmes at Holy Cross School.

### **Executive summary:**

We all appreciate there is no 'silver bullet' or programme that has all the answers, that will work for every learner or in every school. We understand it is about knowing **our learners** and how best to provide for **their needs**, it is about staff **working collaboratively** to understand, address the needs of, and make a difference for our learners and it is about intentional acts of teaching supported by intentional acts of leadership to ensure we make a positive difference for the students entrusted in our care.

We have a saying at our school that states: " There are many busses going past Holy Cross but we can't get on them all". Our challenge, the challenge for all schools, is to be very clear about which busses to take and once this has been determined, to establish clear goals and then work to achieve these through strategic and deliberate decision making, prioritised action and ongoing review.

Linda Bendikson, Director for The University of Auckland Centre for Educational Leadership describes models and programmes as being useful for reflecting on your own situation- for what you do and what you need to do but she stresses the importance of recognising and acting upon **what is needed in your school** which will be different from the school down the road.

The resource I have put together identifies some of the current research, programmes, models and frameworks. Many hours were spent reading, meeting, observing, engaging in dialogue and reflecting. It was time I valued greatly, it stimulated thinking and confirmed my passion for education and my belief that teaching is one of the most rewarding professions with which to be involved. I am excited with the direction education is taking and look forward to being involved in this continued journey.

### **Purpose, Background and Rationale:**

When considering my sabbatical application I reflected upon the question I regularly ask myself; the same question I ask of our teachers, '**what will have the most significant impact upon our learners now, and in the future?**' I considered the journey of our school to date and our desire to embed and sustain good practice. We have had and continue to have a strong focus on literacy, as this underpins every area of the curriculum; we continue to look for ways to strengthen and improve on what we are doing. Some key achievements to date include:

- ★ Commitment to a dedicated, structured and protected literacy time
- ★ Support and opportunities for literacy leadership to support the school's literacy journey
- ★ Prioritised professional learning for staff (teachers, English language assistants, bilingual tutors and teacher aides. This learning is targeted, ongoing and responsive.

- ★ Structures and practices to support the ongoing review, development and integration of literacy
- ★ The implementation of a very successful Intensive Oral Language Programme (Think-Talk-Create)

Our focus on literacy has resulted in continued improvement for our learners but we know there is always more we can do; we continue to ask, 'and what else' in terms of how we provide for our learners. This sabbatical provided a wonderful opportunity to look current literacy practices, resources and programmes, to present these to the staff at Holy Cross to assist with our current and future planning and it helped me compile a resource to share with the wider learning community.

## Methodology

For a significant part of my sabbatical I chose to return to Melbourne to reconnect with Martina Tassone, previously with Catholic Education Office but who now works for the University of Melbourne. Martina, I consider to be one of the most knowledgeable and inspiring literacy experts I have had the privilege to meet and work with. Martina combines strong interpersonal skills with a practical, realistic approach but with a press on growth and development. Martina was incredibly generous with her time, taking me to schools, allowing me to participate in professional development she was delivering and sharing her vast knowledge and expertise with me.

Activities I engaged in to support the focus of my sabbatical included:

- **Professional Reading-** planned, focused time to process information about, and links to, literacy ( and wider education) texts, including Ministry of Education and Education Review Office resources and to navigate related sites-primarily TKI and sites recommended by Martina Tassone.
- **Professional Learning-** Engaging collaboratively with professionals working in the field of literacy to determine what they consider to be essential in terms of literacy practices in schools, and the practicalities associated with these. I also used to time to view Ted Talks and links to YouTube clips connected to my topic.
- **School Visits:** During my sabbatical I visited two schools in New Zealand and five schools in Melbourne. As part of my visit to Melbourne I also spent half a day participating in, and observing, a successful professional development structure set up at one of the schools I visited.
- **Observation:** Observing programmes and structures in schools, discussing and considering ways these schools facilitate staff, student and community understanding of and engagement with these and how they sustain what has been set in place.

- **Resource Synthesis:** The development of a resource to provide a synthesis of key ideas, resources and supports for use at Holy Cross and others schools, if they find something that supports their direction and need.
  
- **Photographic Record:** I sought the permission of schools I visited to take photographs- allowing me to record interesting ideas and examples of good practice. These photos have provided a useful stimulus for reflection and subsequent discussion with staff.

## **Findings:**

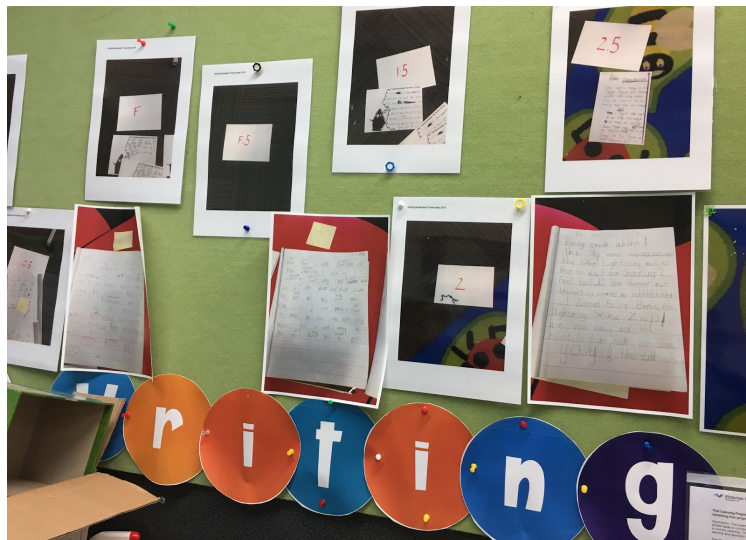
**Melbourne:** In Melbourne I visited five schools, ranging in size from 100 to 500 students. Each day, following these visits, I spent time with Martina discussing what I had observed as well as current research, practices and understandings. Martina demonstrated a powerful professional development model she uses and she shared many of literacy resources she rates highly.

The thing that stood out for me in all the schools I visited in Melbourne was the coherence that was evident throughout- at the state level, within schools and within classrooms. Literacy goals and practices in the schools I visited were understood, literacy learning and supports were 'visible', consistent and understood at every level.

### **Literacy leadership and support:**

- ★ The importance of literacy and the role of the literacy leader is greatly valued and resourced accordingly.
  
- ★ Each school I visited had a dedicated literacy leader released for between 2-4 days each week, supporting literacy structures within the school, teacher inquiries, data discussions and leading professional development. Literacy leaders were available to work alongside staff both in classrooms and during teachers' classroom release time. The literacy leaders themselves received on- going professional development and support- both within school and by attending state run training days which provide regular opportunities to collaborate with other literacy leaders.
  
- ★ Professional Development: A very powerful model of professional development I observed can be summarised as such:
  - PD provider (Martina) working alongside the literacy leader (LL) and staff for a number of years with a key focus on building teachers capacity to make choices.
  - Support for the Lit leader and staff that is structured, yet responsive, and includes:
    - development of pedagogical knowledge with links and access to outstanding literacy resources- texts and websites but also modelling of lessons, planning and teaching lessons together and regular coaching sessions

- Development and use of a regular, consistent observation and feedback process that supports teachers to reflect upon student progress, teacher goals, their current practice and next steps. - This is carried out once or twice a term by PD provider and weekly by literacy leader. It provides opportunities to recognise and celebrate shifts in practice, student achievement successes and allows for supports to be put in place in a timely manner.
- PD sessions are tailored to need thus they may be individual, syndicate based or whole staff. Each session starts with a professional reading- chosen to support and prompt reflection and build on where the school is at.
- Ongoing goals, ideas and discussions from past sessions are recorded- all have a copy of these.
- Questions or comments are used to provoke thinking, reflection and future action e.g., “What are your takings from the reading? How are you managing your goals? What would you say have been the biggest changes for you? What did you reflect on? What might you share with your colleagues and what evidence might you use?”
- Data analysis, including moderation, is central to all discussions. Knowledge of age appropriate achievement is developed and visuals to support this understanding are in place- so that teachers can refer back to these to check their assessment decisions. Examples of work from students at that school are used.



- At the end of each term teachers select and share with their colleagues an example of literacy learning or development.
- At the end of each year the staff of two or three schools who have been working with Martina come together for a literacy expo.

- Martina and the literacy leader prompt teachers each term and throughout the year to keep in mind what they might share, "Think about what you will showcase for your colleagues that shows your learning as well as student learning".
- Martina works closely with the whole leadership team and supports the setting of goals for the annual and strategic plans.

**Areas of discussion and focus:**

**Literature for Literacy-** The selection of 'rich' literature to support literacy programmes at all levels of the school, is an articulated focus; this means ensuring quality texts and resources are selected, referred to and utilised in literacy lessons **at all levels**. Not only does this provide a context for learning but from the time they start school students are exposed to high quality texts with explicit links being made e.g., a comment to a young writer 'That is amazing, you've written a word just like one of our favourite authors, Joy Cowley would use'! High frequency words are taught, but taught in the context of rich texts not in isolation.

**Coherence:** The purposeful and explicit linking of literacy to current topic areas was evident in many of the schools I visited e.g., I was visiting a school in the afternoon and observed a teacher taking a guided reading text linked to the science fair topic a group was working on. Increasingly teachers are considering and planning for the literacy in maths, literacy in science etc.

In almost all classrooms, at all levels were interactive word walls that included words from all learning areas. The students had great ownership of these walls which were referred to regularly e.g., as students left the room for lunch the teacher read a definition and the children had to identify the word, or the teacher would say the word and invite someone to provide the definition or a synonym.



**Independent Reading** - In all the schools we visited in Melbourne I observed a focus on **independent reading** at all levels of the school. Students had a variety of text types in their own reading box and an identified learning goal which helped focus their reading. Clear and consistent expectations were evident, school-wide. The example below was displayed in the equivalent of a Year 6 classroom.



The purpose of the independent boxes is: to foster a love of reading, expose students to a variety of texts and to provide opportunities for purposeful reading by providing clear expectations. In establishing and maintaining these boxes, deliberate strategies are taught and goals set, often based on the work of Fountas and Pinnell. The example below shows the current and achieved reading goals for a Year 6 student.

**Alicia**

**MY READING GOALS...**

| THE reading goal I WAS WORKING TOWARDS:  | THE reading goal I HAVE achieved:   |
|--|---|
| My goal is to make inferences about how multiple characters feel about each other. | My reading goal is to justify my predictions using evidence from the text.<br>Alicia<br>My reading goal is to summarise what is happening in the story up to this point.<br>I-I-What connections can I make between characters in the text and other texts.<br>T-S-How am I using my my experiences to better understand the character or what is happening in the story.<br>Alicia |



Two particular programmes were used in a number of the schools I visited and in many other Melbourne schools. I am not advocating the use of these programmes but include an outline for schools to discern whether they might address a need.

**Leveled Literacy Intervention system** (Fountas and Pinnell): In a number of schools we visited LLI was used to support groups of students. This is an intensive, small-group, supplementary literacy intervention for students who find reading and writing difficult. The goal of *LLI* is to lift the literacy achievement of students who are not achieving grade-level expectations in reading. The *LLI* systems are designed to:

- Advance the literacy learning of students not meeting grade-level expectations in reading
- Deepen and expand comprehension with close reading
- Elevate the expertise of teachers
- Increase reading volume by engaging students in large amounts of successful daily reading
- Increase student engagement with books that build knowledge
- Intervene with small groups of struggling readers to maximize growth
- Meet the needs of struggling readers
- Monitor student progress.

Some schools target areas with the most need whereas others run LLI at each level. It is an expensive resource so would need to be given careful consideration but in the schools we visited, implementation of LLI was achieving positive results.

**The Daily 5 Literacy Framework** ( Gail Boushey and Joan Moser) . A number of schools were using this framework to support students' learning in a consistent manner. There was flexibility around the use of this programme -with teachers determining how it would be implemented in their classrooms to best meet the needs of their learners.

The Daily 5 aims to create **a structure in which students participate in meaningful activities, while educators work uninterrupted with small groups and individuals.** The Daily 5 method offers students the following five choices of activities to work independently toward personal literacy goals:

- **Read to Self-** During this time students are each equipped with books, seated alone, and reading independently. Creating a classroom full of independent readers with extended stamina requires slow and thoughtful execution. Three key strategies used

are: *Teaching Students the 3 Ways to Read a Book, Encouraging the “I-PICK” Good-Fit Books Method, Providing Quality Reading Materials*


- **Work on Writing** - During this rotation, students have extended time to practice and the freedom to explore different writing topics. “Work on Writing” can be used to continue the writing style or process that may have been taught in a separate writing lesson or workshop outside of the Daily 5, but this should not always be the case. Sustained writing of any form chosen by the student chooses should remain the focus of this rotation.
- **Read to Someone:** offers children the opportunity to pair up and share a book of their choosing. This rotation is sometimes referred to as partner reading, buddy reading, or read with a friend. “Read to Someone” provides a meaningful time for developing readers to increase their comprehension, fluency, and accuracy.
- **Listen to Reading** “Listen to Reading” can take many different forms, including online audiobooks and Web-based solutions. For emerging readers, time spent listening to fluent reading models is invaluable to building reading pronunciation and expression. Struggling readers also find this rotation beneficial, as it allows them to access texts that meet their listening comprehension level, even if that exceeds their reading level.
- **Word Work** The “Word Work” component of the Daily 5 focuses on spelling and vocabulary by creating a print-rich environment and offering learning manipulatives for students to experiment and develop an interest in language. Students are able to select from a variety of materials to play with words, word patterns, word families, and so on to hone their knowledge and increase their writing skills.

Note: The structures around each of the Daily 5 choices take time to establish but once these are in place the teacher is able to work with literacy groups knowing the students working independently are engaged in meaningful activities.

## **Synthesis of discovery:**

In the table below I have aimed to provide a synthesis, including links, of some of the most **amazing resources** I viewed, reviewed, had shared with me or discovered during my sabbatical. Each of these has stimulated my thinking or deepened my understanding in some way, I include them for other leaders and schools in the hope there may be something here that will support your journey and where you are at right now.

Whilst a number of these resources are not directly related to my sabbatical topic they have been included as they provide useful links in their topic areas.

| Literacy  | Growth Mindset   | Culture and Belief  | Curriculum supports  | Leadership  |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <p><a href="#">LLP in kidspeak</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sound Sense Y 1-3</a></p>    | <p><a href="#">Mathew Syed Why Should you have your own Black Box?</a></p> <p>Children's Book and Journal written by Matthew Syed- excellent resources</p>  | <p><a href="#">Rea Si'alata PLD videos</a></p> <p><a href="#">ESOL PRINCIPLES</a></p> <p><a href="#">Mere Berryman Weblink</a></p> <p><a href="#">Link to Ann Milne</a></p> | <p><a href="#">Allright Resource</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sparklers Linked to Allright An Incredible Resource for Schools</a></p> <p><a href="#">Dane Robertson Play based learning Kaimai School</a></p>                          | <p><a href="#">Linda Darling Hamond: New Learning for a Rapidly Changing World</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creation of learning ability</li> <li>- Rigorous relevant project learning</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Prof Viviane Robinson Does leadership affect education</a></p> |
| <p><a href="#">Reading Teaching Strategies that Work ERO</a></p>  | <p><a href="#">James Anderson Growth Mindset Teacher Link</a></p>  | <p><a href="#">Every Kid needs a Champion Rita Pierson</a></p>  | <p><a href="#">Bully free</a></p> <p><a href="#">TEP High Expectation Teachers</a></p> <p><a href="#">Research - Teacher Expectation</a></p>   | <p><a href="#">Linda Bendikson Student Centered Leadership</a></p> <p><a href="#">Linda Bendikson Targets as indicators of the larger Vision</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bendikson Establishing goals and Expectation</a></p>  |
| <p><a href="#">Carmel Crevola</a></p> <p><a href="#">SBS News Misty Adoniou</a></p> <p><a href="#">Misty Adoniou</a></p> <p><a href="#">The Conversation: Displays and Decorations</a></p> <p><a href="#">How much does handwriting matter?</a></p> |  | <p><a href="#">The Danger of a Single Story Ted Talk</a></p>  | <p><a href="#">Sylvia Martinez The Maker Movement</a></p> <p>Making sense of the world - because it is their world</p> <p>We need to step out of the way and let it happen- support it to happen</p> <p><a href="#">Blog</a></p> |   |
| <p><a href="#">Nathan Mikare Wallis When should a child learn to write</a></p>  |  | <p><a href="#">Robert Waldinger What makes life Good?</a></p>   | <p><a href="#">Peter O'Connor Learning to Be Creative</a></p> <p><a href="#">Teaching in a Warzone</a></p>   |   |
| <p><a href="#">Victorian Teaching and learning Model FISO</a></p>   |  | <p><a href="#">Gospel Values</a></p> <p><a href="#">CATHOLIC SOCIAL</a></p>   | <p><a href="#">NPDL</a></p> <p><a href="#">Assessment NPDL</a></p>   |   |

|  |  |                          |  |  |
|--|--|--------------------------|--|--|
| <a href="#">Guide to Literacy Teaching Toolkit</a><br><br><a href="#">Victoria Literacy User Map PDF</a><br><br><a href="#">High Impact Teaching Strategies</a><br><br>Educ Victoria |  | <a href="#">TEACHING</a> | <a href="#">Key Competencies</a><br><br><a href="#">Embedding KC in regular activities</a><br><br><a href="#">Important Aspects of KC</a><br><a href="#">Parent KC link</a><br><br><a href="#">Peer feedback</a><br><br><a href="#">Google Science Fair</a><br><br><a href="#">Google teacher Centre</a> |  |
| <a href="#">First Steps</a><br><br><a href="#">Summer slide</a><br><br><a href="#">Summer Slide research</a>   |  |                          | <a href="#">NZCER CURRICULUM</a><br><br><a href="#">Sir Ken Robinson Teachers are like Gardeners</a>   |  |

**Sabbatical Benefits:**

The benefits of this sabbatical I hope will be far reaching.

For me as a leader it has both affirmed and strengthened my commitment to ensuring literacy development remain a focus for all learners at Holy Cross School- students, staff and community. It has prompted me reflect upon the systems, supports and structures we have in place currently and I look forward to reviewing these with our staff and PD providers. It has affirmed the outstanding teaching and learning practices I know to be in place at Holy Cross School and I would like to acknowledge our staff who work with incredible focus to make a real difference for our diverse learners.

As a result of this sabbatical I have knowledge of a number of resources that I know will support educators with the teaching of literacy. For the staff at Holy Cross and anyone who reads this report I hope that the links and reflections I provide will assist them in strengthening their practice to meet the identified needs of their learners.

I have re established a connection with Martina Tassone and I look forward to maintaining contact with her; I will continue to follow with interest any education papers she puts out or resources she shares with me. Martina is, in my opinion, a world-class educator with deep yet practical knowledge, I feel privileged to know her both as a friend and an educator.

Ultimately I hope the students in our school will benefit from the impact upon practice this report has upon those who read it.

The compilation of ideas, practices, resources and reflections I have put together confirm what I believe to be sound pedagogy and practice and they will continue to guide me in my leadership journey.

### **Conclusions:**

The task of teaching literacy is both simple and complex! This sabbatical report recognises that each school, indeed each educator, is on a unique literacy journey but shows there is an availability of literature and other resources to support successful literacy practices in classrooms and schools.

Success in the teaching of literacy requires educators to honestly and openly reflect upon their own knowledge and practices as well commit to working collectively to empower and support one another to meet the needs of the students with whom they work. It requires teachers to be active seekers of knowledge, committed to their own learning and that of others.

From my reading, observations and experience, what works best is having a planned, but responsive approach, utilising 'Literature for Literacy', providing authentic contexts and content that will both engage and support learners.

A key role of the literacy leader and the leadership team is to facilitate a deep understanding of pedagogically sound practices through planned professional development and support programmes. Valuing, and resourcing, the role of literacy leader has a significant impact upon teachers teaching and students learning.

Prioritising time for teachers to engage in professional reading and discussion, share 'puzzles of practice' and reflect upon the impact of their teaching supports individual growth as well as a team approach to teaching and learning.

Regular opportunities to celebrate and share learning with colleagues from the same and other schools provides a valuable structure that deprivatises classrooms and facilitates the sharing of good practice.

### **Resources purchased and referred to but not directly referenced:**

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