

**Sabbatical report;
Fraser Smith
Oturu School.**

Summary;

I had been telling stories to students, and using them as reading to, and adding on... The stories grew with the students. After a reading to focus in our school I was having trouble finding material that worked with our Maori students and me.

Purpose;

To write drafts of stories that would make strong connections with our Maori students, boys especially... and try these stories with other schools as well as Oturu.

Background;

I had close connections with a cluster of Principals who agreed I could work in their schools.

Methodology;

I wrote some drafts (3) and took them to some schools, where the students gave me significant feedback. I took their feedback home and rewrote, adding stories as I did.

I ended up with enough material for a book of stories, and started recording them, with music and sound effects on a free download sound programme called Audacity.

After visiting four schools continually, I kept tweaking the stories until I ran out of time. 10 weeks flew by.

Findings.

Interestingly what I thought was a lone story turned into about 6 with another potential 10 to come as the themes developed.

Working with students from other schools was inspirational. Perhaps because I was a "visiting author" they really got into the act. Most sessions were for one and a half hours and were very full on. Attention spans were terrific.

I began to get into deeper features of the writing and investigate the kids understanding, I left a lot of questions hovering and unanswered to allow further research if there was enough interest. I worked with the teachers and Principals in the schools. And each time I returned with another chapter fresh from being written, it was anticipated as a living story by a wide eyed audience... The "what ifs" grew and grew.

Also interestingly, in my own school the stories worked best read aloud live, with eye contact and action. In the schools I visited they preferred the sound track with special effects and music... but the eyes were on me as they listened and questions and suggestions were always there at the end.

Implications.

I think my stories worked as read to stories which was the intention... however I am not so sure they can carry their own weight as a silent read alone. I will need to hone in on this aspect, probably using a similar process... kids as the test of success.

As I write I can also think about reading responses and note these on the side, as parts of a reading unit for guided silent, and shared reading.

As a small school Principal I am often in classrooms teaching on short notice. My story folder is very useful and fun to use on these occasions; but I have to keep it growing because the old stories wear out... although the best ones can last quite a few repeats.

I have requests for stories I have made up on the spot and must write down from memory... except the kids remember them better than I do. So they retell for me.
These are the next ones to write down seriously.

Conclusions.

I need to put aside a writing time in my day... Easier said than done; but a habit I intend to begin after the current ERO visit.

I will also develop stories at different levels for different age groups; currently years 5-8 have been my main focus... so the junior school need some stories written for them.

I will keep writing for "country kids."

I will find ways to use them to develop comprehension; thinking and questioning skills.

One day when they are sorted they might see print.