

**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.