

# **PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT 2015**

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## **Accelerating learning in writing for students achieving below or well below the National Standards**

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Takitimu Primary School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and sabbatical leave. Many thanks to the staff and in particular our Deputy Principal Sue Baird for leading the school in my absence.

I wish to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for the provision of sabbaticals for principals. This is an important programme which can lead to positive improvements within schools.

Thanks to the principals who gave their time to discuss and share their experiences and practices.

### **Purpose**

To investigate effective programmes and/or use of innovation that has been proven to accelerate student achievement in writing at years 1-8, focusing on Maori students achieving below and well below the National Standard.

### **Background**

I have been Principal at Takitimu Primary School for ten years.

In 2014 the whole school participated in the literacy project called, “Accelerating Learning in Literacy”. The project highlighted to me that a few of our children have been achieving below the National Standards in writing for year after year despite us putting in place learning interventions and special programmes to support them.

I began to question what we were doing as a school to support these children and particularly to accelerate their learning. This led me to read research on the teaching of writing and asking other Principals what they were doing in their schools to support these children.

## **Methodology**

During my sabbatical I visited ten schools in Southland and Dunedin, ranging from decile 2 to 10. I interviewed each of the Principals asking the following questions:

What percentages of your children are below/well below?

What process do teachers go through to make the overall judgement?

What have you done in the past year to accelerate learning for children?

What do you think is the single most important factor or condition for accelerating learning for your children?

## **Findings**

### **What percentages of your children are below/well below?**

- The range was from 4% to 40%.
- There was a correlation between decile rating and the percentage of children achieving below and well below the National Standards.

### **What process do teachers go through to make the overall judgement?**

- Summative tests (PAT, asttle)
- Data analysis
- Formative assessment
- Whole staff moderation meetings
- Wedge graphs
- Target students assessment
- Teacher inquiry outcomes
- Anecdotal notes
- Comparing 3 or 4 pieces of writing
- Work in teams/syndicates to moderate writing
- School indicators based on curriculum documents (i.e., Literacy Progressions)
- School rubrics
- Using Literacy Learning Progressions
- Professional development in literacy learning
- Inter school moderation
- Mapping learning
- Using PaCT
- Tracking progress every five weeks

### **What have you done in the past year to accelerate learning for children?**

- Encouraging better teacher/child relationships
- School driven professional development
- Building a solid values base in the school
- Establishing a reception class for new entrants
- Increasing teacher knowledge of cultural competencies
- A school curriculum with progress indicators
- Student data monitoring fortnightly
- Building up parent support/connecting with parents
- Reflecting the life of children is empowering well below and below kids
- In depth thinking and valuing kids thinking
- Small group teaching
- One on one teaching
- Group withdrawal teaching
- Moderating writing with other schools
- Teachers released
- Experiences
- Identify their audience wider audience
- Sending children's writing home once a week
- Showcase children's writing
- An exemplar junior writing train for children to compare their writing with
- Making the tasks small
- Modelling writing
- Mini workshops in class on punctuation
- Ensuring there is a good understanding of what acceleration is
- Ensure teachers are clear on writing expectations
- Kept register of at risk children - Each child has an accelerated learning plan which is updated twice a year. It is discussed at syndicate level and shared with parents and children
- Goal books - children find evidence and get it signed off by the teacher
- Teacher aide support
- Establish a boy's class
- Target children
- Stricter moderation
- Writing rubric from Year 1 to Year 6
- Establish self-directed learning
- Focus on effective teaching practice
- Parent engagement
- Engaging children in writing
- Professional development

### **What do you think is the single most important factor or condition for accelerating learning for your children?**

- Highly trained teacher aides
- A feedback culture where no one is scared to share
- Relationships - children are valued and learning is co-constructed
- Writing withdrawal group

- Treat each case on an individual basis
- Constantly monitor target children
- Professional discussions
- Building trust within staff
- Family/parent engagement
- Children driving learning
- Close monitoring of children and teacher discussion about achievement

## **Conclusions**

- The programmes and innovations used to accelerate learning in the school's I visited were many and varied to cater for the various learning needs children have.
- Student learning and social needs are taken into account when planning accelerated learning programmes.
- What works in one school may not necessarily work in another.
- Each school has developed a unique culture to support learners and that culture informs the type of programmes used and the way they are used.
- Ongoing inquiry into the process of learning by teachers and Principals is essential for accelerated learning.