

Sabbatical Report

Fraser Smith, Principal, Oturu School.

Purpose of the sabbatical.

September 2015 summary so far.

With students across 2 schools;

- Build on previous research and further develop my own writing to produce a shared resource that fills a recognized need for Maori students in years 5-8. This resource should be available as a high interest accessible read that Maori students in particular can identify with. The work should suit as a read to text with lots of dialogue.

I worked with a group of boys from Mangonui and Oturu schools. Most of our time was spent reading my writing to these boys and discussing the writing. We looked at writing for an audience, effect, sense, plot, setting, characters, dialogue, inference, adding sound effects, music, and recording on garage band.

- Use my writing as an example, and after research, trial ways to use aspects of student agency and authentic learning to encourage the students' connection with literacy.

The boys enjoyed being part of a special boys group. Each group met for an hour once a week. We had lots of lively discussion and story time, (me reading) often went on for over 30 minutes. Copies of the draft writing was given to the boys as chapters to take home and add to or just read; we got up to chapter 10 and I read excerpts from later chapters and discussed how the story could develop. The boys offered their ideas and there was a lot of lively discussion.

The boys always enjoyed these sessions. Being read to by a man; telling, discussing, and singing parts of the stories with them was probably an unusual experience.

It was unusual for me not to have girls in the group. The boys became very "matesy" very quickly. They supported each other and responded with glee to some of the humour in my stories. (Written with boys in mind.)

I was working with the boys as a writer. I discussed the difficulties I had with editing, writing for others, and being understood. We all identified that sometimes we think we have said things we haven't. "The reader cannot read your mind." We identified that it is important to have our work read and commented on by others. And that we should read others work carefully and listen carefully to feedback. Reading and writing are not separate subjects.

I had 30,000 words worked on previously; written in the first person. Part of my time I spent rewriting this in the third person to give it more room for expression. The boys identified that being consistent in tense and style was a challenge.

Programme outline, and time commitment.

Weeks 1 and 2;

Re-craft the first 5 chapters of my "story" in preparation for sharing with groups. This will involve a re-write from the "first person" to the "third person" which will allow a faster pace and more dialogue, with a goal to suit reading aloud.

Weeks 3 and 4;

Take the first chapters to 2 trial schools, work with groups of students. Read and share my writing. Critique and discuss effective writing, and ways to share this. Prepare the learners for writing a piece of their own for a specific audience and purpose. Share editing techniques. Record me reading aloud with sound effects, and share.

Weeks 5 and 6:

Research the work of experts regarding teaching writing. Visit other schools.

Weeks 7 and 8;

Research.

Students prepare writing and share in groups. Begin some recording.

Weeks 9 and 10;

Boys comments about their writing;

They are mostly tired of recount.

They need a purpose to write.

They get hoha with slow results, eg; plan, draft, recraft, publish.

Science for instance, provides a reason for writing, with diagrams and explanations.

Songs, rap songs, writing to record works, so do Plays and writing to perform.

Under tools in google docs is a recording tool which does the writing for you, just speak slowly. There is a quick result and editing becomes an essential skill when using this tool. Slower writers enjoyed this.

Garage band was effective when performing the boys writing as a radio play. Great interaction, voice overs and sound effects. We wrote some raps to music which were very engaging too.

STORIES are really important to children. They need regular exposure!

Some Sabbatical observations from student's conversations and good practise.

Thanks to some readings and conversations involving;

Gail Loam.

Sally Muir

Dr Barbara Watson

Mangonui and Oturu boys.

They provided the following.

In an ideal world-

Teachers take special interest in the students in their care as precious human beings.

Teachers are the most enthusiastic learner in the room!

We write to share our experiences, students over time will learn that they have much in their lives worth writing about and they can craft their experience into cohesive pieces of writing.

Through writing, not just to look but to describe what we see and feel. Metacognition. Raising levels of sensitivity and response to the world.

The teacher of writing reads and writes.

Writing can make sense of our lives as we talk, wonder and write it down.

There is an absolute expectation that all students store experiences, and it is the teachers job to draw the stories and opinions out. Writing is a rehearsal in making meaning.

Chn need to be encouraged so that they gradually learn to access their memories through visualising independently. Tap into universal experiences.

We should be constantly seeking those pieces of writing that have some impact; what makes it compelling to read are the images provided for the reader.

Every child brings valuable personal experience to school. There are many shared topics that provide a unique experience that is different for each child such as;

- Waking up the morning.
- Hide and seek
- Friends and family
- School days
- Swimming lessons etc
- Illness
- Sensory perception
- Holidays
- Seasons
- Making huts
- Saturday morning
- Things I love
- Listing poems
- Describe a room (bedroom, garage, favourite place.
- Singular items; birds nests, blossom, crab, fritters, shell, cauliflower.
- Getting into very cold water

Routines like; jotting, drafting, sharing and peer response should be a regular process.

Investigate note books and jottings.

Develop a writers toolbox.

Writing narrative benefits all genres. The Child that writes a thin, loose narrative will also most likely write an ineffectual persuasive essay.

SHOW rather than TELL in your writing.

Through the creative response pupils are able through reading and responding to literature to develop an understanding of and ever widening range of written forms. (cameos) Writers noticing what is around them.

IMAGES created in our brain through language connect neurons in our brain enhancing learning and memory.

Indicators of a good piece of writing.

- It is legible
- It hooks in the reader making them want to read on
- It conveys a message that can be understood
- The form suits the purpose
- There is sincerity of voice
- It is constructed to read fluently
- The vocabulary chosen is appropriate for the subject matter and the intended audience
- There is evidence of deliberate attempts to include specific language features which enhance the telling, a sense of audience.

“Writing is living work rather than desk work.”

An independent learner and writer would

- Love words, and stories, and talking, and patterns of sound.
- Know they have something to say
- Experience writing as an important part of their lives
- Be enthusiastic and gain deep satisfaction from their writing
- Jot in a notebook regularly and use their jottings as springboards for their writing
- Be able to talk about their writing knowledgably
- Practise proof reading and editing as an integral part of their writing
- Seek responses to their writings from their peers and the teacher
- Understand that the purpose of their writing demands a particular form, or combination of forms, or language features
- Experiment with ideas that have been explored in mini lessons, crafting and recrafting for better effect
- Be constantly aware of possibilities for their writing in their world and beyond
- Use author mentors from a range of literature, for inspiration, guidance and modelling
- Write for the love of it

Some aspects of change we must consider for effective classroom practise.

- Writing and reading are closely related and should be taught together.
- Writing and reading, sharing work and reading aloud should be daily reciprocal practise. Consider the learners circle. Where all have opportunity for sharing as a group and a class.
- Talk with each child about the PURPOSE of writing often
- Teach paragraphs as an organisational tool from an early age; (new idea= space and new line.)
- Work hard at COMPOSING THE MESSAGE.
- Pictures; colour drawings can be an important prewriting activity for all ages
- Talk first, then write
- A writers notebook can include; new vocab, ideas, brief lines, experiences, insights, visions etc
- Vocab cards kept- kids say a word slowly and listen, they try to write it. Teacher writes it. They keep it and add to it.
- Pack more interest into the writing
- Shift from simple to complex using a variety of ways to improve fast.
- Avoid “ability grouping” move to differentiated teaching. Reading and writing are for yourself-they help you understand and discover.
- Ensure that every day you are asking; “what could you write about that?”
Conversations are early ideas that can be refined and made sense of when written down.
- Handwriting as a copy off the board lesson is extinct! It should happen during writing as soon as possible. Aim for consistency; all letters the same size, all capitals big etc
- Ensure the words go down VERY QUICKLY

- Writing environment set up could include; joby crayons, sticky pads, no-one is too old to draw a picture first.

Some BIG ideas are;

A literacy time is an opportunity for joy and wonder sharing stories, language, words, and rhymes, poems, orally, written, acted out and read. Reading and writing should not be taught at different times.

Ability grouping should be avoided and circle sharing is a good way for all the class to have input. The teacher should use this to clarify and discuss ideas and concepts.

Like maths, the purpose should relate to life experiences and needs. The genre and purpose should be taught and be understood by students.

Writing is a very useful tool for making meaning of thinking. As we consider metacognition, comprehension, or understanding inference, or maths concepts and we recognise this as a weakness in many of our students- then the links between writing, reading and maths are unavoidable.

A good literacy and numeracy curriculum plan should show links to these connections, authentic learning and pedagogy.

POST SCRIPT.

The teacher as a writer. Weeks 12 and 13.

I was time for me to USE the indicators of good writing mentioned earlier and take my writing further.

During the holidays I found an editor and rewrote 30,000 words of a story for rural kids. There is not in my experience enough reading material out there for rural kids. There is also a shortage to suit 8-12 year olds. I also wanted it to be authentic, believable, out of Aoteroa, (not Captain Underpants style, and to be suitable for reading aloud. Having read to the boys groups I knew what was working. I finished it, sent it to my editor, and got it back with suggestions.

Then I went back to school and got caught up in busy times.

December 2015

Last weekend 9 weeks later, I reworked the manuscript again. I think it's nearly there and a few tweaks will see it finished. My editor has done all she can. I have a close relative who is a writer, and after she has read it I will have another look.

I continue to look for ways to encourage kids as writers, this requires more time than I had and there is no one answer.

There is not one thing we must do to change boy's attitudes to writing, but if I had to choose one thing it would be passion for writing and reading. The teacher should love literacy and have lots of ways to show this love to kids.

Muriwhenua Learning and change network.

There are 10 Far north schools in our LCN.

At Oturu school our 2015 data show a significant group of year 5,6,7 boys whose writing achievement data is below their reading. Our LCN schools are finding similar patterns. We are defining these students as targets for 2016.

We have had one combined staff meeting with teachers from all our schools moderating writing assessment. We have just held another PLD day in late January 2016, with Dr Brian Annan (infinity Learning) on Learning maps. All our cluster schools will be using learning maps to get to know our learner, their whanau and their influences better. Our cluster want to try the pact tool to boost teacher knowledge in writing. At Oturu writing is our focus for 2016.