

Take the Time

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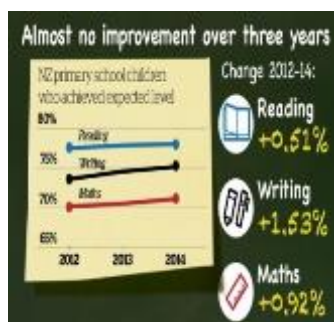
Principal Sabbatical Report Term 3 2016

The Background

For the first time in my extensive 41 year career in various facets of education I've been given permission to "take the time". That, in itself, is not easy. Teachers fill every moment organising, planning, interacting and learning. We cram our days with priority lists, people and tasks. To step away, slow down and reflect on what really matters, if we have actually made a difference, and our effectiveness as leaders, is daunting.

Over the last four decades I have been part of a multitude of different approaches, initiatives and major changes in education. I've worked in open plan barns, variable spaces, single cells and now innovative learning environments.

I remember vividly Sunday afternoons in the late 70's spent staring at blank planning pages waiting for inspiration. Teachers are no longer filling in the days with things they think will interest and engage learners. They are highly skilled, accountable practitioners with a vast array of skills and tools. They establish effective relationships, foster home-school partnerships, assess and plan according to needs, differentiate learning, teach explicitly and have in depth knowledge of learning steps, yet many children still struggle to learn with minimal improvement over time. A recent article by Stuart McNaughton, NZ Herald 2016 illustrated the minimal effect our hard work is having.



Schools alone can't fix this. No amount of testing, talking and teacher time can bridge this gap effectively.

"The average performance of systems is not the most important factor; rather, the *gap* between low and high performers is....The problem of inequality is becoming more pronounced and more entrenched decade by decade...a social time bomb." Michael Fullan

To make a real difference, changes need to start in the preschool years and more particularly with parents. My goal is to produce a simple, practical resource to support parents, particularly young mums, to share quality learning experiences with their children to provide them with a strong base for future learning. The strategies need to be communicated face to face and one of the ideal opportunities for this presents itself when schools are delivering Reading Together.

The Context

Mauku is a rapidly growing, diverse rural school. The children represent eleven different ethnic groups and an exceptionally wide range of backgrounds. Mauku has historically attracted half of its students from the local town. Most of these children meet poverty line measures, the majority of the remaining group hail from local lifestyle blocks and represent the relatively advantaged "other half".

These interesting dynamics create challenges and certainly make for an exciting learning environment!

The Challenge

The diverse needs of our five year old enrolments present many challenges for us. Sadly, many tumble off the bus unable to follow simple instructions, uttering single word responses, struggling to socialise with their peers and with exceptionally limited vocabulary. They are already vulnerable and disadvantaged. We need to work frantically to bridge the gaps with limited resources and time.

My aim is to work with local families through early childhood agencies and support groups to introduce them to a set of simple activities to help their children's early literacy and social development.

The Resource...

Take the Time...to play, interact and explore



A magic moment caught on Samsung -a very young Maori couple playing at the local beach with their pre-schoolers on a sunny winter's day.

Designed to be shared in a face to face setting, the following ideas will stimulate talk and help our pre-schoolers manage the school learning environment confidently.

Take the Time...to talk

Your children need your **presence** more than your **presents**.

Jesse Jackson

Rationale

Kids who hear more words spoken at home learn more words and enter school with better vocabularies. This larger vocabulary pays off exponentially as a child progresses through school. It's never too soon to start talking to a baby — describing out loud everything that's going on around you. It's also important to listen and respond to what young children are communicating.

Suggestions:

- ☺ Drop down to your child's height, stay close and talk quietly with them.
- ☺ Ask questions, answer their questions.
- ☺ Explain the world around you as you drive, walk and explore.
- ☺ Use a gentle supportive voice and body language.
- ☺ Talk with them in proper sentences- not just single words and phrases.
- ☺ Model the correct way to say things.
- ☺ Praise them with kind words in whole sentences when they do well.
- ☺ Move close to them to talk.

- ☺ Play "I Spy" with your child using words that describe an object's position. ("I spy something on the carpet, in front of the couch, next to the dog.") Expand this activity by playing "Simon Says" using directional words. ("Simon says put your hand above your head.")

- ☺ Make up your own simple talking games- celebrate how clever you all are!

Take the Time...to “write” together

The best thing that you give to your children is **TIME**.

J D Ghai

Rationale:

We say words, read those same words and write the words. The more words we know the better we communicate. Establishing these links early will form the foundations for future learning. Make writing fun without ever criticising early efforts. It is normal for young children to scribble and don't expect to be able to “read” their work!

Suggestions:

- ✓ Write or draw on a window when it's steamed up-even in the car
- ✓ Use a white board marker on the window-supervised!
- ✓ Find a stick and make shapes, draw pictures, write names in the sand- remember there is NEVER a time to criticize effort
- ✓ Use tweezers or tongs to move objects around-great for fine motor skills
- ✓ Tip some flour or sugar on a meat tray and “write” names
- ✓ Make play dough sausages to make and write things
- ✓ Paint with cotton buds-great to help good pencil grip later
- ✓ Thread beads on to strings or pipe-cleaners
- ✓ Lace strings in and out of pictures- use a hole punch to make your own
- ✓ Let the children “write” every time you do.
- ✓ Colour in together
- ✓ Make up a writing box for your children. Treasure it by making it very special with stickers, drawings and “talking it up”.

Take the Time...to explore

If you want your children to turn out well, spend twice as much time with them, and half as much money.

Brightside.me

Rationale:

Think about young children. They touch everything. They want to pick up stuff off the shelves at the grocery store. They want to touch the pretty glass decorations at your neighbour's house. They ask questions: What is that? Who is that? What is that sound? What is that smell? How long until we get there? They "get into" stuff and can, if misunderstood, annoy their caregivers to no end. Young children, like babies and toddlers, are naturally interested in their surroundings. Without this driving curiosity, without this innate need to explore and understand what the environment provides, children would fail to thrive and to learn. Their ability to make connections and sense of their world would be jeopardized and it is plausible to say that their development would be compromised.

*Don't allow things in your home
to hold more value
than your own child's growth.*

Born to Explore, Missy Willis, M.Ed. 2015

Strategies:

- Go for walks locally- explore the trees, textures, colours, playgrounds.
- Explore local beaches- dig, make castles, climb and paddle.
- Let your children "help" you with the dishes, cleaning, washing!
- Find safe places for climbing and crawling. Ask for big boxes and play in them.
- Make huts with blankets and sheets
- Share any jobs you do with them- let them help you cook
- Find "free" toys- reuse and recycle
- Join the local toy library and actual library.
- Get cosy and read books. Talk about what's happening in the pictures-answer their questions.
- Make a plan to visit a new place every month-walking there is a great opportunity to interact and explore.
- Play, play, play and have fun together every day.

The Next Step.

The intention now is to share these strategies with colleagues and target key groups of young mums in our local community.

The organisations and personnel in this group include-

- Our Franklin RTLit
- The newly established Pukekohe Communities of Learners
- Local schools implementing the Reading Together programme
- Te Huarahi Raising Maori Achievement local initiative
- Franklin Support Services Centre
- Young families through the local schools and preschool liaisons

The conclusion.

We are never finished. We can always do more.

“Research is unequivocal that the expectations and involvement of parents makes a significant difference to children’s educational achievement. The role of parents and whanau is critical in children’s learning and development.” Inquiry into engaging parents in their children’s education. NZ Kindergartens submission Dec 2013.

To enable our new entrants the opportunity to “hit the ground running” at primary school we need to support and strengthen communities and increase their involvement in the education of children. To effectively engage parents in their child’s learning, we need to develop respectful reciprocal relationships, multiple pathways to involve parents, positive transitions and good leadership and support across communities. My simple resource will go some way to meeting this goal.