Effie's Story

What Happened?

I have always been interested in learning: - What it is and what I value in it?

Through the "Learning to Learn" project I found myself being interested but initially cautious. I was reluctant to let go of what I thought was already working well.

However, because of who I am and my desire to be an effective teacher and to do "my best" – which is what I expect of my students – I started to become more and more curious of the "Learning to Learn" Project.

After having been given the opportunity to go to various conferences, listen and chat to other colleagues and an opportunity to be involved in some teaching with Peggy Williams, I found myself needing to make some changes.

These changes have been made easier because of such documents as SACSA, Building on Success, and conferences on Productive Pedagogies and John Joseph.

An important aspect of all of this is that no change would have taken place without the support of my learning team, Peggy Williams and the Learning to Learn Project.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

This is a significant change for me because I have started to move away from emphasising content to skills and opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking and having a choice in selection of topics, activities and presentation in order to meet outcomes.

This have given students opportunities to connect and make meaning with their learning.

Some curriculum areas which as occurred are:

Spelling Program
- Students have a choice of activities from Gardner's Multiple Intelligences
- Students make their spelling list more personalised and hence relevant but still including topic/theme lists to reinforce grammar and rules.

Reading Program
- Students have a choice of activities from Bloom's Taxonomy.

Language
- Tony Buzan – using "Mind Maps" in narratives, poetry, Maths (introduction of topics) and for Student Reflection.

Maths
- This has been an area that I have found difficult to make dramatic changes. I have started with what I considered a "safe" area – Measurement. Using the SACSA outcomes, I drew up a series of activities from Bloom's Taxonomy to reinforce the outcomes of Measurement – length, perimeter and area.

Society and Environment
In my learning team, we have spent time discussing. "Student initiated Learning". We chose the topic of "Endangered Animals". In planning this unit I have attempted to:

- Provide Students with choices eg. – Learning partners, animal
- Connect topic to our world
- Give the unit purpose by posing a problem and asking for possible solutions
- Incorporate higher order thinking skills
- Incorporate the various learning styles of the students
- Enhance I.T. skills – Interactive Powerpoint using a digital camera, hyper-links to the internet, movie camera
- Provide students with explicit criteria so as to be successful – a Rubric

How do you know this has made a difference?

Firstly, the enjoyment and enthusiasm from the students and from myself to the changes have been most evident.

The students are excited, actively engaged with the tasks and are asking clarifying questions about their learning eg.- "What does this mean?", "Why does this happen when I do…………….?

The most significant change has been the active engagement of students of a lower academic ability. Their ability to be involved at their level to complete tasks has been very important to their self esteem.

However, achievement of goals can be difficult in some curriculum areas. In Maths, Spelling and Reading it has been easier but in some areas (eg Society & Environment) where opinions are sought and there are no clear right or wrong answers, it has been harder to assess. (In many ways a reflection of today's global society).

Here I believe using rubrics for assessment with clear understanding of outcomes and expectations for the children and the teacher are crucial.