

TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN (17/08/11)

The classroom teachers who make the biggest difference to your child's learning at school tend to be those who create programme designs that actually do challenge and charge the child's thirst for inquiry. The programmes on offer are more individualised for the children of the class, rather than the same as next door or across the entire syndicate or school. Teachers at Elmwood know that they have professional licence to be as creative as they can when designing learning programmes. They also know that what is taught must align with the NZ curriculum and the associated Standards. However, this does not prevent them from injecting their own initiative into the teaching delivery. Pivotal to our teachers' programme delivery is for them to have knowledge of, and align to, what the children within their own classrooms need to learn. The natural follow-on to this is 'how can these children learn best through the teaching expertise they have within themselves.' While the NZ curriculum provides direction on the essential learning requirements for our children, it also allows plenty of scope for the teachers to be creative in selecting rich concepts that engage inquisitive minds into learning areas that centre on high interest activity attuned to the learning motivation at the time of the teaching. While we encourage teachers to share their planning ideas, share their resources, and share their teaching techniques with each other, we also encourage them to expand their own horizons towards exploring programme designs that enrich their own passion, flair and creativity that is best fit for the class they teach.

For our children to reach and utilise their full potential and to become successful citizens they require a 'think smart' outlook towards learning. This most often comes from programme designs on offer in their classroom and the teacher influence is the critical factor. The extra edge we often talk about comes from curriculum delivery approaches that engage a child to become a seeker of solutions, reflective and intellectually curious. This comes through all kinds of thinking and all kinds of contexts. It includes creative, critical and logical thinking and the ability to deliberate – as well as self-awareness, reflection and judgment.

In active learning classrooms children will be encouraged to express their ideas, make intelligent conversation and participate in discussions within their level of maturity. Helping them to understand when it is, and isn't appropriate to voice their opinion is important to avoid any confusion. What we do not want is for our children to be so confused about whether, or when, to express their ideas and opinions that they hide their viewpoint, lose their spark to contribute and become vague in their communication. We all know that the level of complexity and the appropriateness of the topic being talked about will determine a child's readiness for inclusion in discussion. We know that a key aspect to a child becoming independent is knowing when and how to ask for assistance, express a need, say 'no' to something they don't feel comfortable about, express feelings and opinions and be able to enquire about the things they want to know.

Thinking outside the square is also an essential learning process that children need to acquire in order to develop their ability to assimilate, organise, prioritise and research further the information they receive. This aspect of their learning is often more challenging for teachers, and a range of teaching tools and models are used to focus on those learning habits that will produce in the child a greater sense of learning accountability, and of course the sustainability needed for higher level extension and challenge.

Processes that help children 'understand their knowledge' and how best they can use this acquired skill to transfer learning gains into new and exciting opportunities, ought to be a classroom priority. Teachers should design and offer programmes that will trigger the children's minds to think smart, be creative, investigate options and make good decisions, engaging them in a range of challenge and problem solving activities. While this is a complex and extremely challenging task, this aspect of our work is stimulating and rewarding. As teachers, we will continue to research and investigate approaches to better understand the learning habits that children need to acquire to be successful learners, frequently referring to the works of well known educational researchers and theorists to facilitate our own learning. We always have opportunities to be extremely proactive about trialling and reshaping new and exciting approaches based on our own research and study, and an extensive array of learning models and tools that we select to meet the needs of all the children. Being consciously thoughtful in our selection to capture specific learning needs must be a reality of classroom practice that will bring a progressive edge to our own teaching delivery, leading towards extended and higher standards for the children of Elmwood Normal.

An important aspect of education is to develop the child's awareness of their role in contributing to their society. We want the children to understand that the social and economic world they live in is shaped by the people within, and that their own positive contribution is necessary to sustain the kind of society we all want to enjoy. We want the children at Elmwood Normal to display a strong sense of 'community'.

In summary, I'm hoping that we will always approach curriculum change with a realisation that it takes enlightened teaching and delivery strategies to make the difference we are seeking in our vision for the future. The critical aspect of this is how the teachers themselves design their curriculum delivery for their own classroom.

Kevin Gooch
Principal