

Australia- April 2020 - Class Teacher Summer Intensives Tutors and Teacher Groups Class Teacher Zoom Meetings and Sharing

Introduction

We have just spoken with around 190-200 class teachers in seven year groups. Here in Australia we have a strong community and have met in class groups each summer for 14 years. The mood is one of creative reflection on ways of finding the essence of the teaching, of deepening relationship to the children and sensing healthy ways to connect the children to life, nature and community.

Phone calls, full packages with stories, plant seeds, festival projects, library books, crafts ideas, personal cards for each child and birthday gifts are going out. The stories and introduction to Main Lesson activities are offered initially for parents to deliver but also for those who cannot do this, as audio only files, as nearly all the teachers prefer the inward mood of this medium. Some shared that when a parent requested a meeting on a visual medium including the child it was too confronting for the younger children. Sometimes the packages are dropped at the gate of the home garden so the teacher can have a quick conversation.

Teachers prepare mainly creative project based work for after Main Lesson including maths in cooking and games and the arts linked to gardening projects, observations and drawing time in nature. Individual examples of connection include - pen pals via the post which are set up for English practice. Teachers are phoning each parent and older child every week or twice a week. Sometimes the children are given a buddy to phone to share ideas for joint projects. Children create board games to play with the family based on the stories. The ideas are flowing and adjusted as teachers reflect on whether it suited the age of the children.

Class 1

There are many different scenarios. In South Australia in a stream school half of the children attend, in other schools only 3 in a class.

One teacher described audio recording of morning circle and the story for Main Lesson available on a parent's platform and some do this as well as sending out a written copy. After this, activities are open ended and creative or practical such as a nature task and creating a garden area.

An experienced teacher and teacher training tutor reflected on **five important considerations** already experienced in schools which have not yet had holidays but have been remote teaching:

1. The quality of the teacher's voice is important. The hearing sense is inward and provides a deeper connection.
2. The unity of the curriculum and the day can be safeguarded and care is taken that deconstruction does not occur in packaging experiences for parents to provide for children.
3. Zoom trials have given teachers the experience that the screen is distracting for giving lessons for the younger ones. On occasion a screen meeting for a social connection has met a need.
4. Parents are paying fees and want to understand how the curriculum is being delivered and outcomes met. What are the teachers doing? They like to see quality materials and sufficient quantity for their child with options to choose the essential and extended material.
5. Some parents have asked how teachers know their child is learning. They ask- are you in touch with their progress through formative assessment?

Maths?

Teachers had pondered how to do early counting and concrete maths activities given Class 1 has only just started. Audio scenarios of clapping and stamping, imaginative set up of materials and counters may be possible or more exploratory play-based work. Most teachers used handouts and

audio files only but one teacher who had very visual learners had sent a short video of her teaching maths games as a trial and acted as if the children were in the room in her imagination. It was not a Zoom meeting.

The Healing Power of Story

This is therapy for us all, children, parents and teachers. They have the power to move our souls. Stories can be sent home for parents to tell or recorded on Audacity as MP3s. The story needs to finish at a resolution each day even if the Main Lesson writing and drawing continues over two days.

Several teachers focused on **connection with children** through:

- Children sending letters or drawings to each other.
- Parents sharing photos of children's work with the teacher.
- Conference call with the class each week.
- Sharing a birthday wish they made for a child through parents sending in to teacher.
- All children gather and light a candle at the same time for the verse in the morning or for a birthday.
- Children have phone buddies for projects.

Inner Work of the Teacher

Inner connection is more important than ever.

Picturing each child every evening and morning takes only 5 minutes but allows inspirations for teaching ideas to flow. It is an important source of creativity and connection in these times.

Class 2

Essentials for home packs

- Main Lesson books and crayons and pencils
- Recorders
- Painting resources
- Craft tools- fabric from home can also be used
- Nature counters and Maths resources

Reflections on the Essential

1. We aim to allow the child to create their own experiences and do not give them fixed concepts. Children's questions and experiences connect the dots. We wish to develop free human beings.
2. The teacher's love for the children can shine through.
3. Our spiritual view of the child strengthens them.
4. The story material is a treasure as it cuts away the superficiality. We create pictures of the lives of the Saints.
5. The King of Ireland's Son also has the trails and adventures that the child of this age can meet.
6. Parents need to feel that teachers are teaching still. Parents need a communication strategy such as a group, regular calls or whole class phone meetings.
7. Connection to nature is health-giving.

Individual Strategies

- A conference call to all children at the start of the day for the verse and first outline of the Main Lesson sets up a time rhythm and connection.

- If you do a Zoom with the children socially once or twice a week then mute them all initially as you speak to them and then let them speak or call out hello to each other at the end.
- Ask each child to draw a picture of other children in the class, create a card for each child over time or write letters.

Class 3

Central Thoughts Experienced and Reflected Upon

This allows us all to reflect on what is essential and what is not.

The child needs the curriculum to remain teacher-centred.

The teacher is needed as a presence in family life.

Parents are enlivened by the content of the curriculum and gain more insight into how it works. They are very grateful.

The role of the teacher is not to entertain the children at home. Everything has substance.

As teachers we need to put as much of ourselves into each resource or package, each audio file which relates strongly and imaginatively to the children as though they were before me.

Parents are asked to keep children away from general parent emails.

Parents who do not have printers are supplied with paper copies.

It seems it may be premature for children to hear their own recorded voices and videos.

Additional Ideas for Connection to Children and Nature

- Teachers had written letters to children.
- They had asked children to connect to nature and their home environment through looking outside their windows and describing in a few words or drawing what they saw to share with others.
- Parents were asked to choose a novel to read to the children of the family each day.
- Audio files for this age can have prompts for stopping to do short activities. The mobile phone is a sufficient tool for recording an MP3 file.
- Children were given a photo of the teacher's daily blackboard drawing.
- Each family has a nature table.

Class 4

Shared Ideas

- One teacher wrote a group letter to the whole class with an individual note for each child at the end.
- Another dropped off parcels and picked up the previous weeks work at the same time.
- Each child in one class had an hour individual/family –teacher time a week via phone or zoom.
- Teachers email the work but make clear that parents are not under pressure but can choose how much a family and child can do.
- Parents do not need a device or printer but work is dropped off if they cannot access this.
- Work was posted back or uploaded for marking and feedback daily.
- Whole class social zooms plus core skills teaching via a Zoom a couple of times a week.
- A teacher who had already been working remotely for 3 weeks found that a Main Lesson task was important and after that a maths task, story and practical task were optional for the family.
- Parents need a sample timetable for the morning and after lunch should be free creative time with a suggestion.
- Some parents will feel there is too much work and others that it is not enough. Every child is also different in strength of focus and time they can concentrate alone.

- Children with skills that need repeated work to catch up can do this individually now. This includes literacy and times tables. Some students are blossoming under their parents individual care.

Activities for New Ways of Working in Families at Home

- Cooking and writing out a recipe.
- Observing the sky, clouds, weather or moon.
- Find one thing each day you are grateful for.
- Make a board game form a mythological story.
- Learn a new skill and teach another family member.
- Create a festival or nature table for the family and add form walks.

Class 5

Sharing of Ideas

- Children can write letters to each other (or parents can photograph and email to friends).
- All maths can be practical. Cook a meal each week and halve the recipe for a smaller family.
- Send seed packs home for a garden. Measure water given each day.
- Children need a dedicated study area.
- The afternoon activities and arts can be a choice- sculpture or painting on the story?

The Importance of Mythology and the Meaning in Stories

Each story provides an opportunity to work with soul forces, transformation and human development. The suffering of Heracles is an example. The stories of India and Persia were also meaning-filled. What is important is how we tell the story. The moment when we meet a seemingly insurmountable obstacle can be deeply pondered and provide courage for the outcome as we step through thresholds.

Time in Nature

Do things which reduce stress such as observing and drawing a patch of garden each day or different times of day.

Create a beauty diary of nature from walks. Write poems from observations.

Observe the moon each evening. Keep a weather diary.

The Whole Class Entity

Become aware as at teacher of what the whole class carries each day and what now the individual child needs help to carry alone.

Mathematics

Maths is a place of safety and security where there is dependability. It can calm anxiety in children. Grammar in English and structured lessons also calm the feelings.

Class 6

Sharing Ideas

- Children can write a cookbook over time from their recipes.
- Include significant chores at home to help the family.
- A Zoom whole class meeting briefly at 9 am starts off the day together.
- Send home geometry kits and practical activities such as lanterns.
- Have a drop of point at school for work to be returned for feedback.
- Some schools are providing laptops for families to access the work.
- Group Zooms can work well with this age for teaching in groups and for social connection. They love to smile and laugh with classmates once or twice a week.

- Ask families what their needs are. Have some independent work so parents can get their work done.
- Ask children to create a puppet show.

Meaningful Stories

Stories such as Alexander the Great, St Michael and the Dragon, The Greeks at Troy are wonderful for helping the children to meet challenges and overcome fear through the action and the hero's unfoldment. Teachers can help students live in the interior mood.

They can write their poems of the heroes and trials.

They can read a novel such as the story of Hannibal.

Caring and Connection

- Ask children to do something for someone else such as a grandparent or neighbour.
- Have pen pals between younger and older children.
- Share library books.
- Spend time caring for parents and talking to them regularly.

Class 7

Sharing Ways of Working

- Some children with additional needs still attend school for an hour or so for Extra Lesson or remedial support.
- Support teachers also look over lesson plans for the next day to add differentiation for students with whom they would normally work in the classroom.
- In Year 7 phone buddies are used for maths practice and even reading a novel together and answering questions on it.
- A couple of teachers have a morning conference call for 20 minutes for the verse and going through the work.
- Stream schools still have 50% of students so they teach one day and send the work for those at home the next. Some audio record files to send on day 1.
- Most schools are using a combination of packs, audio files and emailed material to print off with instructions.
- Important to have a daily outline which is very clear. On-line resources can still be high quality with an aesthetic and artistry.
- In some schools, students upload their own work and have a text/chat function with the teacher if all are doing remote learning.
- Audacity is a useful mobile and computer software for audio and can be uploaded to a learning platform or emailed.
- Platforms- *Schoolbox* has been successfully used as has *Google classroom* or *Teams Sharepoint*. There is a need to check student chatting possibilities and minimise this or block unsupervised chats. The AIS can negotiate a cheaper *Zoom* price for schools. Zoom has security of letting students in through a waiting room.

Creative Ideas

- Making a medieval banner
- Creating wind powered technologies
- Sending out recommended reading classics.
- Focussing in curriculum on well-being in all four areas- Physical, Social, Emotional and Spiritual.
- Stained glass windows made at home from packs sent out.
- Board games loaned out from the school.

Built Up from All Classes- and Conversation with Lisa Devine

Family Conversations with Children

1. **Gratitude** is a theme taken up with the older class teacher children or with families. What were they given by life today? What joy or beauty or wisdom could they find in these times? What are they thankful for?
2. Secondly comes the question of **what was challenging that day**- what was difficult to bear?
3. Finally - **what they were able to contribute to the world** is reflected on. This allows long term healing and a positive integration of our experiences over time. Examples may be a deed for a neighbour or a letter to grandparents.

Just one theme per day is enough.