



PLAY IS THE WAY® CAN'T BE DONE WITHOUT READING THE RESOURCES

By Wilson McCaskill

If there is one skill I would wish for above all others it would be the ability to take all our resources and substitute every word into some kind of graphic, diagram, picture, cartoon, story board, animation or other form of visual representation that would spare teachers the need to read in order to absorb the information contained in each resource. In fact, it would be nice to have a visual means to convey what I have just said! However, I don't have this skill and I doubt if anyone does. I take comfort in the knowledge that even great filmmakers are rarely able to visually capture the full content of a good book adapted for screen.

I mention this because increasingly I'm finding that teachers are trying to implement Play Is The Way® in their classrooms and schools without first doing the required amount of reading (and it is not much). Hence, they are running into difficulties that could have been easily avoided if they had just done sufficient study of the basics before commencing Play Is The Way®.

More often than not, when I ask teachers who are having difficulty if they have done the required initial reading, they quite openly say, no and then proceed to tell me they don't like reading and they find it hard to learn by reading because they are, visual learners.

I often feel prompted to reply that unless we are blind we are all visual learners! But I don't. Instead I wait and they invariably go on to say that there just isn't the time - crowded curriculum and all that. A few will say what I suspect is the reason for most and that is; by the end of the day they are just too tired and they can't be bothered.

I really do appreciate just how busy and tiring teaching is, though I do think the, "I'm a visual learner" is more an excuse than a reason, especially when literacy is a core subject and we are meant to be actively fostering a love of reading in our children. And if it is a reason, shouldn't the reply be the same as the one we would give to a student, namely work on your weaknesses and read more. Besides, if we won't read, when it is necessary to do so, why should our students?

My concern is that schools are investing in Play Is The Way® resources and not reaping the benefit of those resources because teachers and often administrators are ill informed about the substantial amount of content contained within them.

So often, I will receive an email query from a teacher about a child that is causing them concern or from an administrator with a query about implementation and my



answer is to point them to a particular page or chapter in Volume One (red manual). More worrying still, is that this page or chapter is invariably at the front of the manual. I believe that the resources do not make for difficult reading and many of those who have read them have told me so.

That aside, the problem is how to get the information contained within those manuals into the daily operational effectiveness of teachers. Our Implementation Guide advises schools to set up an action team of teachers with the interest, commitment and energy to read and discuss the content of the resources. This team can act as the go-to personnel for other members of staff as well as the team that directs the professional learning of all staff in the Play Is The Way® methodology. It is this team that can deliver a constant stream of Play Is The Way® information at staff meetings or other opportune moments.

I know of one principal who commits time at every staff meeting to the playing of a Play Is The Way® game or its variation and the ongoing learning of Play Is The Way® philosophy and content as described in the resources. Often teachers are asked to take different chapters of the manuals and share their understanding of those chapters at staff meetings. In order to motivate his staff and to ensure they know the value he places on social and emotional learning, he makes sure that whatever he expects them to read he has read and them some – including the dry and boring research that validates his views on behaviour education. Needless to say, his school's delivery of Play Is The Way® has brought great benefit to the students in its care.

No one, least of all me, expects teachers to read all the resources or indeed a single manual in one sitting. Even if teachers did do that they would never retain all the information they have worked through. The idea is for teachers to do the required amount of reading to start the program and then to return to the manual regularly to increase their knowledge and improve their effectiveness.

Having an action team acts as a back up and ensures that if teachers, for what ever reason can't or won't read, the investment the school has made is not wasted, because the action team can continue to deepen and enrich the knowledge required by staff to maximise the long term benefits of Play Is The Way®.