**NOVEMBER 2015 VOCATIONAL TRAINING TEAM SUMMARY**

**Five Alberta teachers visited the Cayo educational district and with the support of the local education office they spent one week in four different village schools. VTT members provided school based professional development for teachers and school administration and shared resources, modelled effective literacy teaching approaches, provided professional development and coached classroom teachers. A debrief of the project follows:**

**Our Team Debrief** (Judy, Diane, Amanda J, Amanda W, Cathy)

General Comments:

* We need more time at the schools. Two days was too short of a format to make a lasting relationship and impact for the teachers.
* If we were to follow the same format could someone come down earlier to visit with the teachers and ask them what they would specifically want to work on and how we could address their needs. We need more information ahead of time or longer time with schools.
* Another suggestion would be more people. We found a Canadian teacher matched with a Belizean teacher was a great way to build a relationship and provide them with enough feedback and resources in the short amount of time.
* We all enjoyed getting to work in and visit the village schools.
* Judith spent four days in the school and still found it challenging to address all the needs of the teachers and students by herself in the short time frame.
* All of us experienced losing some time in the schools due to covering classes for sick/teachers away on leave, or spending time (1st afternoon) with division wide activity for their ‘reading competition’ which was happening while we were there. We would have liked to have been aware of a few things ahead of time, such as the Infant 1&2 getting dismissed at 2:30 every day.
* Teachers need access to more appropriate levelled reading materials (or how to manage them - how do you level books, put them in classrooms, how can you use the library (connect Terecita to a contact at each school), home reading programs.
* Need to spread the word about reading coaches and getting credit for PD if that gets approved

Observations from the schools:

* Overall all the teachers were very receptive and open to the project.
* We noticed that some of the teachers were nervous because they felt like they were being evaluated. With the ministry being present they experienced some hesitation being honest about their struggles.
* The ministry did not visit all the schools involved in the project and it would have been nice to have their role balanced between all 5 schools.
* We were very impressed with the involvement of the ministry at the schools they did visit. They went above and beyond with supporting the project and did a great job at providing positive feedback to the teachers.
* We all commented on the high expectations placed on teachers in terms of planning. Majority of teachers spend their whole weekend planning and feel very rigid about their schedule and their planning.
* Principals are required to review their weekly plans and sign off on them. The teachers then feel committed to move along on their lesson plans regardless of the progression of the students.
* All of us felt that the curriculum was way above where the students were developmentally ready. For example students in Infant 1 learning about grammatical rules before knowing their alphabet.
* Noticed a huge difference in student’s literacy success between classes of 33 and classes of 20- 25 or less than that in some cases
* Oral language needs to be a non-negotiable, and students need time to converse in class and outside of class in English.
* We noticed a huge difference in teachers with formal training and those who didn't, so the program must be good

Comments on materials and activities we brought:

* Teachers liked when the materials could be modeled in the classroom and activities that could be integrated across the curriculum.
* We need to bring less ‘stuff’ and use more of what they have and show them how to use what they have.
* Bring hands-on literacy centers ready to go to model in classrooms… Kids are sitting and waiting when they finish early.

Ideas for moving forward:

* We would love to see the schools have more opportunities for collaboration. If two schools with similar backgrounds pair up and allow teachers to meet with a colleague teaching the same grade(s) as them. This would allow them the opportunity to discuss best practice and share planning responsibilities.
* They need more access to grade appropriate reading materials.
* Helping them use the stuff they already have (computers, books, etc) rather than bringing more stuff to them.

Reading camp:

* We need to find high interest, low vocabulary activities for the reading camp so that the kids are engaged but also working at their level
* We need to focus on oral language in all the strands of the reading camp… Kids talking to kids (this is a real weakness)
* We need to focus on ways to be most effective (eg smaller numbers of kids in groups to help be most effective in the three days we have with students we don’t know, activities that teach students independent strategies)
* There will be kids who don't speak/understand any English… Need to use strategies like having a student translate, and give them the English information, then have student return and speak in English

Questions:

* Do teachers have to pay for printing /photocopying at the ministry office?
* Could we get a copy of their books/readers to have in Red Deer to use when planning for future Literacy Alive projects?
* How do they keep track of the resources each school has (some are stacked and some have nothing) - could the ministry do a better job of keeping track of donations and where they go?