



### **Making a difference.... One fish at a time**

You may be familiar with this short little story. Two people were walking along the shoreline when they noticed that thousands and thousands of starfish were being washed onto the beach. As they walked along the beach somewhat dismayed about the situation, the first beach comer began to pick up starfish and throw them back into the sea. The second person turned to the first one and saidm "Why are you wasting your energy throwing single starfish back into the sea? There are so many. It could not possibly make a difference." As the first person looked to the second she replied, "It makes a huge difference to the ones I toss back."

Often, being a teacher, we can feel overwhelmed. The complexity and the enormity of the job we are asked to do can seem like the seashore awash with helpless starfish.

The previous weekend I received a text from a teacher who was touched as she understood the depth of a single student's math anxiety expressed in an essay.

On Monday morning we met with nursing educators concerned about the critical thinking skills of the students in their program.

The week before, I visited a classroom where *the 'sit and get a worksheet model'* was in full bloom. Students were numbed by repetition and stymied by algorithms.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed.....and very understandable.

Yet it is at the essence of what teachers do. We bend down and pick up a starfish.

A Collaborative resource teacher spent Saturday morning with an idealistic, wide-eyed first year teacher needing help and support and feeling as though he were drowning in a tidal wave of work... They talked .... And as hard as it is to believe, the resource teacher listened. There was so much there... lesson plans, administrator expectations, learning new content, and the pedagogy, all of this before the large number and high need of the students is addressed. It was truly more than could be "fixed" on a Saturday morning. So they picked one or two things that the new teacher felt would make the biggest difference and focused on those things. (Starfish)

On Thursday, the senior nurses, visited the Collaborative, a little lost and a lot unconfident in their ability to do math. An hour or so later, they left confident and renewed. One young lady sat a bit longer working on questions she had about the math, the resource teacher patiently guiding the student to confidence and understanding. (Starfish)

The teacher who texted about the anxiety of her student the week before leaned into the challenge of building a foundation that would allow the student to grow. It might be a blossom that will bloom in the sunshine of another semester. (Starfish)

Each opportunity a starfish making a minuscule dent in the larger context. Each opportunity making a huge difference in the life of that one person.

A starfish returned to the ocean.....

Truth be known.... I believe that I have been a starfish more than a few times in my life...

How about you?

Happy Maths People,

*Peter*