

Introduction

Welcome to the January/February 2005 issue of the Leadership for Learning Journal. The purpose of this bimonthly publication is to promote curriculum and instructional leadership, encourage innovation in teaching and learning, and showcase action research projects that have recently been undertaken in Surrey schools.

Guildford Park Secondary has done extensive work to improve reading comprehension among grade 8 and 9 students in a number of curriculum areas. Three key instructional strategies have been implemented. The common approaches across the curriculum resulted in significant gains in reading achievement.

“Reading Rockets” at Dr. F.D. Sinclair was featured in our March/April 2004 issue. This follow-up report provides us with some insight into the conditions that need to be in place if improvement in reading is to be sustained over time.

Our professional development section describes in specific terms the offerings at the “Building Inclusive Communities” Special Education Conference taking place at Earl Marriott on February 18. The topics would be of interest to both special education and classroom teachers.

The Leadership Academy Advisory Board

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Using Instructional Literacy Strategies Across the Curriculum to Increase Student Reading Comprehension

GUILDFORD PARK SECONDARY ACTION RESEARCH TEAM: Alexis Biggar, Laurel Cooper, Neder Dhillon, Kirsten Farquhar, Chris Foster, June James, Shannon Little, Padraic O'Donnell, Maureen Mace, Sue Melville-Brown, Carol Morris (VP), Wendy Nielsen, Carolyn Oram (Principal), Val Smith, Ken Strain, Johan Stroman, Patrice White, Shawn Yu.

CONTEXT:

Guildford Park Secondary is an inner city school located on the north side of Surrey. Many of the students come from single parent families on income assistance or with low incomes. The student population is highly transient, as the number of students moving in and out of the school is consistently high from year to year. Many students do not receive academic or social support from home.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Would the broad and consistent use of three instructional literacy strategies across the curriculum lead to an increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in reading comprehension?

TEAM:

The team was comprised of all of the teachers from the Grade 8 SESM program (students grouped together for Socials, English, Science, Math) as well as teachers from the English, CAPP, Home Economics and Humanities departments, a vice-principal and the principal.

ACTION:

Members of the action research team began by working with consultant Audrey Hobbes-Johnson to design an assessment tool that would utilize resources already in place at Guildford Park. The reading inventory that was developed was intended to measure selected aspects of reading comprehension abilities of students. These aspects were using background knowledge, making predictions, word comprehension, finding the main idea, summarizing and, making inferences and conclusions.

Once students had participated in the reading inventory at the end of November, the results were used to identify the area(s) in which the greatest number of students required strengthening of skills. The reading inventory demonstrated that the majority of participating students needed help in the areas of find the main idea, summarizing and, making inferences and drawing conclusions. Consequently, it was decided that it would be most useful to concentrate upon developing student skills at finding the main idea. Once the focus of helping students to find the main idea had been established, the next step was to choose three instructional strategies designed to build this skill. These had to be strategies which could be used in the classrooms of all of the participating teachers. With the guidance of the English specialists on the team it was decided that the following strategies

could be comfortably integrated into all of the participating classes:

- Placemat
- Read, Stop, and Write
- Two-Column Notes

The members of the team participated in an in-service during which they became familiar and comfortable with using the strategies with their students. Thus, by February these strategies became part of the shared experience for all grade 8 students in their humanities and science/math classes, as well as in most CAPP and home economics classes. They also were used extensively in both Humanities 9 classes. From February through June the participating teachers made a commitment to use these strategies in their classes on a regular basis.

On June 24 the students were given a second reading inventory to assess the same skills as the first inventory. A different reading passage (also at the grade 8 level) was used during this second assessment.

HOW DID IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

As the teachers increased their use of the strategies within their classes they observed that students were becoming more comfortable with their use. As might be expected, teachers had to devote less time to providing detailed instructions for these activities as the semester progressed. The common language that was being used within the different curricular areas made it easier for students and teachers.

The teachers increasingly reported improvements in students' abilities to find the main idea in reading passages. This anecdotal evidence was supported by the results of the second inventory.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 19% of students who wrote the first assessment achieved an overall rating of "not yet within expectations". By the second assessment this number dropped to 6%.
- 51% of all students who wrote both assessments showed significant improvement from the first to the second.
- The most significant gains were made by students who were low-achievers on the first assessment.
- 88% of students who were not meeting expectations in assessment #1 were meeting minimally, fully, or in some cases, exceeding expectations by assessment #2.
- 59% of the students who were meeting expectations at a minimal level on the first assessment were fully meeting or exceeding by the June assessment.

WHERE TO FROM HERE? WHAT IS NEXT FOR OUR STUDENTS?

We plan to continue with this model for the coming year. This time students will be given the reading inventory earlier in the year and the strategies will be decided upon and in use much earlier than was done the previous year. The fact that the strategies only became a common practice in the classes in February is something that caused some concern. An earlier start will allow for more time for students to improve their reading comprehension. We will continue to track student achievement in this area.

WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT LEADERSHIP FROM THIS PROJECT?

As teachers began to solidify a common and concrete approach to pursue the goal of improving student literacy, individuals began to take on leadership roles. When plans for this project came together teachers sought out ways to enhance our chances for success. Teachers used meeting times to share examples of their strategies in action with other members of the project team, as well as with teachers who were not part of the project. Teachers also sought ways to broaden the circle of individuals who were part of the project. This was established as a goal for the following year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT? FOR SCHOOLS?

We recommend that any school that is looking for a way to improve the literacy rates among their students (particularly younger ones) adopt this model.

“Sinclair Reading Rockets”: Long Term Impact of a Short Term Program

DR. F.D. SINCLAIR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACTION RESEARCH TEAM: Graham Cooper (Principal), Cheryl Andres (Vice Principal), Ann Bryce, Loretta Buchi, Heather Robertson, Marilyn MacDougall and Tracey Tolksdorf.

“Reading Rockets” was a featured article in our March/April 2004 issue. This is a follow-up report.

CONTEXT:

Dr. F. D. Sinclair Elementary is an inner city, high ESL school with 596 students, 83% of whom come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. In general terms, the school reading program focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development and text comprehension. The focus of the school has been to develop the students' knowledge, skills and positive attitude related to improving reading and writing skills. However, it has been found that many of our students appear to be delayed in their acquisition of the reading skills that are generally acquired in the primary grades.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Will the gains resulting from a ten week intensive reading program be sustained in the long term and what determining factors impact on retention?

ACTION:

Initial Study:

As described in a previous article, " 'Reading Rockets': Intense Short Term Reading Support for Grade 2 and 3 Students in a High ESL School" ("Leadership For Learning", Volume 2 (4), March/ April 2004), 2 groups of 8 students were given intensive reading support for 10 week periods.

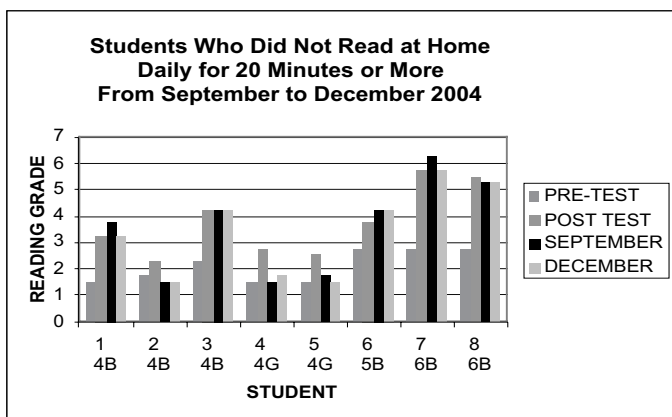
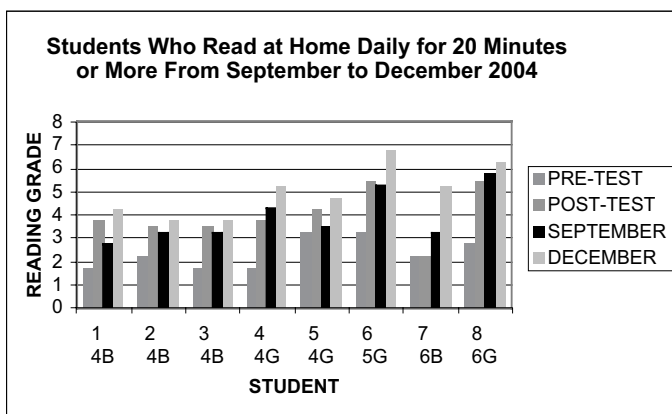
After this article was published, a further 24 students, from grades 3 to 5 received similar support. All but two, showed increased reading scores of one to three years after the ten week program.

Procedure:

Each student, who had received intensive reading in the previous school year, was assessed in September 2004, and was advised to continue to read at home. In December 2004, each student was again tested and interviewed to determine if the student had been reading 20 minutes or more at home on a daily basis. The Alberta Diagnostic Test was used to determine the reading scores.

KEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS:

In the following figures, the "pre-test" shows the reading score prior to intensive reading support, the "post-test" shows the reading score after support, "September" shows the reading scores immediately following the summer vacation, while "December" shows the reading score in mid-December. The numbering, of each student, shows their present grade level and sex. (i.e. 6G stands for Grade 6 girl)



It must be remembered that this study is a follow up to a study that was conducted a year ago. All students in the study were initially identified as having reading scores that were one to three years below grade level. Increases of one to three years were realized when the students received 10 weeks of intensive reading instruction. However, when the students were no longer receiving intensive reading support, some regressed to or close to their initial reading scores. The only students, who showed

continued improvement, were those who reported they were reading at home for twenty minutes or more every night.

On the surface, it would seem that by simply having students read 20 minutes per night would increase reading scores. However, it must also be remembered that the students, who increased their reading scores, now see themselves as readers and enjoy reading each night. Their parents are supportive and proud of their accomplishments. The other students no longer see themselves in the same light plus have not received the same form of parental support.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

All students will be reassessed in March and June. The results will be shared with both the students and parents. Parents will be encouraged to establish an environment at home that both encourages their children to read at home and recognizes their accomplishments.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT? FOR SCHOOLS?

Short-term intensive reading programs can be very effective; however, unless the students view themselves as successful readers and continue to read, further growth may not be forthcoming and in fact the gains can be reversed. Classroom teachers, in all grades, need to not only actively encourage students to read at home but also need to make parents aware of the benefits of having a supportive climate in the home that both recognizes the importance of reading and celebrates their child's success in this area. Classroom teachers and support staff effectively teach students to read but, especially for weaker readers, unless the skill of reading is practiced on a daily basis a student's full reading potential may not be realized. It is recognized that many teachers already run home reading programs and hopefully this study will help show the wisdom of their efforts. For those teachers who are not so inclined, hopefully this study may cause them to give this more consideration.

REFERENCES:

Shinn, M. R. & Baker, S. (1996). *The use of curriculum-based measurement with diverse learners*. In L.A. Suzuki, P.H. Meller, J. G. Pontero, *Handbook of Multicultural Assessment: Clinical, Psychological, and Educational Applications* (pp. 179-222) San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
 Lyon, R. (1997). *Report on learning disabilities research*. <www.jwor.com/research1.htm>

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Book Review

Leadership Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2005). Michael Fullan. Reviewed by Glenn Galy, Principal Surrey Connect

Michael Fullan challenges educators to realize that “nothing tried so far really works”, in terms of achieving lasting large-scale educational reform and that most initiatives tend to result in “surface stuff without any likelihood of lasting”. Fullan asserts that what is now needed is for leaders to combine complexity and systems theory to develop efficient, sophisticated, powerful solutions. These solutions, Fullan argues, must be both theoretical and practical and that the leaders of tomorrow will be ‘new theoreticians’, capable of “working on the real problem of transforming real systems” by “learning by doing”.

According to Fullan, there are eight elements or key ingredients that need to be in place in order to achieve long-lasting sustainable school improvement. These elements include:

- 1) public service with a moral purpose;
- 2) commitment to changing context at all levels;
- 3) lateral capacity building through networks;
- 4) intelligent accountability and capacity building;
- 5) deep learning;
- 6) dual commitment to both short and long-term results;
- 7) cyclical energizing; and,
- 8) the long lever of leadership.

One core goal of Fullan’s book is to illustrate that systems thinking is the key to sustainable long-lasting improvement. Charismatic or individualistic leadership, for example, has been found to be negatively associated with sustainability. The ‘system thinkers in action’ will be the ‘critical new leaders’, according to Fullan, who will make the difference. “They may not have the best elaborate theories of how systems evolve over the long run, but they will be in the midst of action with a system perspective. And they will interact with others to promote systems awareness through their actions and conversations.” (p.43)

While Fullan acknowledges the importance of collaboration, ‘assessment for learning’ strategies, parental involvement, the creation of ‘effective, highly interactive, demanding cultures’, job-embedded learning, reflective practice, mentoring, and networks, he also realizes that a “series of disconnected initiatives is not a

system” (p.87) and is simply “not good enough” to bring about long-lasting, sustainable changes and improvements.

Fullan’s key purpose for writing this book is to emphasize that ‘real’ sustainable solutions will likely fail, at best encountering a ‘ceiling effect’, unless they are ‘tri-level solutions’ - solutions that involve not only the school and community, but also the district and province.

Professional Development SPECIAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Friday, February 18, 2005

(Earl Marriott Secondary
15751 - 16 Avenue, Surrey, BC)

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE...

7:45 am	Registration/Breakfast
8:45 am	Welcome and Keynote Speaker
10:30 am	Intermission/Nutrition Break
11:00 am	Workshops Sessions
12:15 pm	Plenary Panel with Dr. Pat Mirenda and Surrey Students
1:30 pm	Closing Remarks/Conference Close

Building Inclusive Communities - Meeting the Challenge - Looking to the Future (Keynote Address: Dr. Pat Mirenda)

Dr. Pat Mirenda is a Professor in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. She lectures widely and teaches courses about inclusive education, developmental disabilities, autism, augmentative communication, and positive behaviour support. The third edition of her book *Augmentative and alternative communication: Management of severe communication disorders in children and adults* (co-authored with David Beukelman) will be available in 2005. Her current research includes a Canada-wide study of developmental trajectories in children with autism, and a study of the predictors of early intervention outcomes for these children and their families. *This presentation will use the image of a mosaic to examine the changes that have occurred over the past few decades with regard to the contexts in which students with developmental disabilities live, work, play, and go to school. As the “tiles” of the mosaic have changed from segregated to inclusive settings, the role of the “grout” that holds them in place is often misunderstood or overlooked. Specific elements of the “grout” that are relevant to supporting students with developmental disabilities in regular classroom settings will be explored and illustrated.*

Plenary Panel with Dr. Pat Mirenda and Surrey Students: Surrey students with special needs will share their insights on inclusion and discuss their successes and struggles. This panel presentation will be at the end of the conference.

11 Workshop Sessions:

Reaching the Child - Working with students with anxiety (Keli Anderson, FORCE Society for Kid’s Mental Health Care)

Asperger Syndrome: Disabled or differently abled (Jane Kelly, special educator currently at Prince of Wales Secondary in Vancouver)

Working with para-professionals - strategies to facilitate inclusion (Coordinated by Karen Huckle and Helen Etmanski - Integration Support Teachers)

Levels of Choice Making - Promoting self-advocacy for students with severe disabilities (Lorraine Kamp, Augmentative Communication Therapist - Surrey)

What’s positive about positive behaviour support plans? (Laurie Smith, Special Education Teacher for Autism and Dual Diagnosis)

Building a climate of inclusion in schools (Surrey Principals)

Person-Centered Planning - A transition tool for independent living (Wendy MacIntosh - Semiahmoo House Society)

How to get the most from psycho-educational reports. (Tom Morro, MA and Gavin McKenna, MA - Psychologists - Surrey)

Self-determination as part of the high school curriculum (Mary Lynne Coursley, BASES teacher - Surrey)

Emotional Intelligence (Jody Fotheringham, District Resource Counsellor - Surrey)

Auditory Processing (Sandy Collins, Speech-Language Pathologist - Surrey)

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Dr. Burt Deeter, Principal, James Ardiel