HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PRACTICE TO ENHANCE THE TEACHING OF LITERACY?

by

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MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC
January, 2010

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Acknowledgements

I perceived the pursuit of my doctoral studies and the writing of this thesis to be equivalent to the trials and sense of fulfillment of those venturous souls who choose to climb Mount Everest to quench their desire of adventure. My main guide and supervisor Dr. Kate Le Maistre was instrumental in showing me the way and reassuring me on frequent occasions that my research was both relevant and important and that I needed to continue to finish what I had begun. Without her gentle but constant nudging, I might easily not have reached the pinnacle. I owe her great gratitude for being so available and providing support on all levels. My other guide on this tumultuous climb was Jean Fillatre, a fellow doctoral student whose action research study was closely interwoven with mine. The midnight email exchanges, offering words of encouragement and sharing of ideas between critical friends were greatly appreciated and gave me more bolstering and guidance than Jean probably realized and when it was most critical.

I deeply thank my committee members – Dr. Gillian Bramwell, Dr. Sue Hansen, Dr. Shaheen Shariff, and Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson. Each gave me a road map for a part of the climb and without their marking their section of the journey and detailing important points of interest for me that must not be overlooked along the way, I could easily have gotten lost in my readings and struggled more to find the right focus.

There are also the many teachers on staff who became my partners in this journey and openly braved the many challenges we encountered along the way. Without their willingness to explore new literacy-teaching practices coupled with their continuous efforts to improve students’ literacy, a lot of what was accomplished in our school would not have been
possible. They played a very significant role in this study and I am so grateful for their contribution.

Then there is my family – my husband Jack and my adult children Jamie and Sarah whose love and support made this journey possible. Jack especially shared the ups and downs of my research, my frustrations, and endured my joylessness on many occasions. I thank him, knowing that these written words cannot possibly express how deeply thankful I am for his endless corroboration and for believing in me. Lastly, there is my mother Lillian who missed a lot of Sunday dinners with me while I was busy writing. I thank her for all of the loving understanding she displayed over the seven years of my journey. And I am also very appreciative to have inherited some of her wisdom and perseverance that undoubtedly helped me to successfully climb my Mount Everest.
Abstract

The objective of this study was to improve the practice of an elementary principal to enhance the teaching of literacy in an inner city school. Based in the literature on educational leadership and action research, this action research study examines how the role of the principal over a seven year period affected the teaching of literacy. In keeping with action research methodology, the study undergoes three ‘think-act-reflect’ cycles. These action research cycles inform practice, guide the development of literacy initiatives, and result in change. This evolution is documented in the form of vignettes throughout the thesis. Data collection consisted of personal reflections, field notes, results of a researcher-developed questionnaire given to teachers, administrators, and parents; and students’ Developmental Reading Assessment scores. The data analysis incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods to triangulate the research findings and to ensure that all of the key research questions are addressed in a trustworthy manner. Results showed that the nine literacy interventions employed by the principal were effective and that the principal’s practice grew and improved over the study. Stemming from the analysis, an assessment tool was developed to measure the principal’s effectiveness in promoting literacy, a measurement tool that can be used by other principals to gauge their own effectiveness in developing literacy initiatives. The thesis concludes with a reflection addressing the objective of the study, the contribution to living educational theory that conceptually frames the study and offers suggestions for future research in this area.
Résumé

Le but de cette étude était d’améliorer la pratique d’une direction d’école afin d’accroître la qualité de l’enseignement de la littératie dans une école élémentaire urbaine en milieu défavorisé. Fondée sur la littérature portant sur le leadership pédagogique et la recherche-action, la présente recherche-action examine, sur une période de sept ans, comment le rôle d’une direction d’école influence l’enseignement de la littératie. En conformité avec la méthodologie de la recherche-action, l’étude passe par trois étapes soient : planifier, agir, réfléchir. Ces étapes renseignent sur la pratique, servent de guide pour le développement d’initiatives et mènent au changement. Cette évolution est documentée sous forme de vignettes tout au long de cette thèse. La collecte de données est constituée de réflexions personnelles, de notes prises sur le terrain, des résultats des élèves au Trousse d’évaluation DRA et des résultats d’un questionnaire développé par la recherchiste. Ce dernier a été complété par des enseignants, des administrateurs et des parents. L’analyse des données incorpore à la fois des méthodes qualitatives et quantitatives pour cerner les conclusions et s’assurer que les questions essentielles sont traitées de façon valide. Les résultats ont démontré que les neuf interventions utilisées par la direction ont été efficaces et que leurs pratiques se sont améliorées au cours de l’étude. Issu de l’analyse, un outil d’évaluation a été développé pour mesurer l’efficacité de la direction relativement à la promotion de la littératie. Cet outil peut être utilisé par d’autres directions pour évaluer leur propre efficacité quant au développement d’initiatives en littératie. Cette thèse se termine par une réflexion sur le but de cette étude, la contribution d’une théorie pédagogique qui cadre cette étude et offre des suggestions en vue d’une recherche éventuelle dans ce domaine.
Dedication

As I think of the many people who have made significant contributions in shaping my academic development and instilling in me a keen interest to pursue doctoral studies, there are several names mostly those of women who come to mind. But there is one person to whom I feel both morally and emotionally obliged to dedicate this thesis to in her honour posthumously and that is Fran Halliday. I met Fran in 2000 and while the work we did together is documented in this thesis what is not shared in the text is the profound influence she had on me and on this study. She became my mentor, a title I do not bestow lightly and even after her death, which occurred at mid-point in my doctoral research, her sage words and guidance resounded with me throughout the study. In a sense her love of education with all of its facets lives on through her influence that is intricately interwoven into this work. I thank Fran, for taking such a deep interest in my work, for kindling my interest in action research and for lighting the way; without her I would not have undertaken this study. I only regret that she was unable to witness the fruit of her labour which she conducted with endless enthusiasm, passion and commitment.
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