

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

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## 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 littérature 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 littérature. 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 chercheuse. 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 littérature. Cet outil peut être utilisé par d'autres directions pour évaluer leur propre efficacité quant au développement d'initiatives en littérature. 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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