

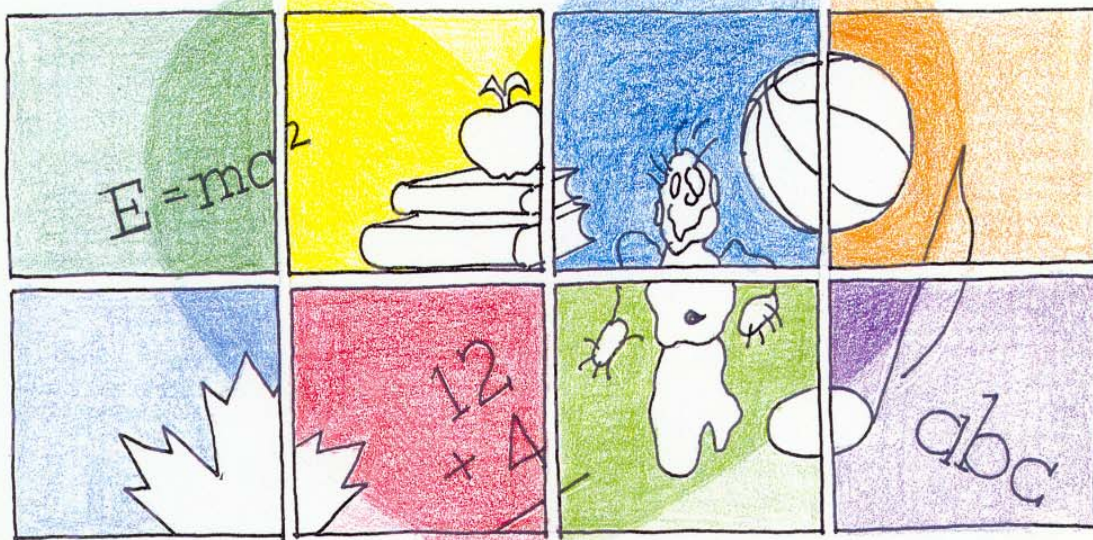
Volume VIII - 2008

Passion

in

Professional

Practice



Action Research in Grand Erie



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A Note from the Editors



Jackie Delong

I am so pleased to be editing our eighth volume of *Passion in Professional Practice*. This volume is different from the other seven because the contents are research projects that were written for accreditation. They are all part of the Data-Based Decision-Making Master of Education course that I taught in the Spring of 2008. Many of the students came to the first class anxious that it was going to be a statistics course. They discovered that data for

improving teaching and learning is all around us: observation, journals, report cards, parent interviews, videotapes, provincial and local standardized assessments. They have confidently and competently described and explained how they have used that data to improve their lives and the lives of their students.

Within these action research projects, you will hear the authors using their living educational theories to explain their lives as educators. One standard of judgment that they use and that I love is “the inclusional standard of judgment of a loving, receptively responsive educational relationship”

(<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/jwsstep130409sandiego.htm>)

I want to thank my fellow editors, Barkev, Lee, Lyndie, for their commitment to this new publication. I want to thank Cindy McMaster for all her work in editing and uploading the projects. As the second cohort is about to graduate, I want to thank the Grand Erie District School Board and Brock University for their continuing partnership with the Master of Education program.



Barkev Palodian

The spirit of the journey is perhaps the best way one might sum up the work published in this eighth volume of *Passion in Professional Practice: Action Research in Grand Erie*. The contributors of Volume VIII are but a small sample of educators from

Grand Erie who have bravely taken the steps to embark on this journey into reflective practice, most recently through their two year commitment toward the completion of a Master in Education degree from Brock University.

The projects published in this edition continue to follow the structure of Dr. Jack Whitehead’s Living Educational theory, an inquiry process that is value based and deeply personal for the researcher. What we hope to achieve from sharing our work is an occasion to instill a sense of purpose for others to similarly “bring their life into word,” and to allow others the opportunity to appreciate their talents as researchers. When we have a portal such as this to share our experiences, we are cultivating a learning community that we can truly appreciate.

How can I encourage teachers to use reflective practice in their teaching?

Jo-Ann Duns

Biography

Jo-Ann is starting her twenty-fifth year of teaching, twenty with the Grand Erie District School Board. Her first five years of teaching were spent in Northern Ontario, teaching on the Native Reserves. She is currently a System Learning Resource Teacher for the Haldimand Family of Schools. She has a concurrent Bachelor of Arts Degree in Child Studies/ Education from Brock University. She is currently enrolled in the Masters of Education Program, Brantford Cohort with Brock University. She has her specialist in Computers in the Classroom and Special Education. This is her second action research project.

Understanding Ourselves

Why is reflective practice so important to me?

I had to figure out why reflective practice was so important to me and how it fit into my life. This is my story of how reflective practice came to be and continues to be a part of my existence.

Have you ever experienced a time in your life where you wished the hands of time could go back and you could erase those events that brought sadness and despair? I have and that year was the year 2007. January brought cold, icy weather and with it trips to my autistic son's school to settle him down. What was happening in his life that would cause such a sweet, tender child to explode and threaten to kill someone? Was it the class? Was it the teacher? Was it some other unknown source? This was the beginning of my reflective practice but I didn't know it at the time. Soon after that problem was solved, my father became ill. After many trips to the hospital, he was released into the kind, gentle care of my mother. Who was to take care of them now? How were we all going to manage? I was reflecting more. Through this trauma, I got sick with my gallbladder and eventually had it out in May of that year. While I was home recuperating, I got a call from my eldest brother saying my nephew had died at home of a stomach aneurysm. This was another young life taken much too soon. Would our lives ever be the same? How could I help my sister-in-law with such a loss? I reflected some more. June rolled around and I was looking forward to the hot lazy days of summer, soon to find out that there was nothing lazy about the summer at all. Time kept going at even a faster pace. I was beginning my Master of Education courses and two exciting years laid ahead for me. School ended and all seemed to be fine for the summer. The first Saturday, we were excited as our relatives arrived from Holland. After picking them up from the airport, we observed my autistic son, drink, go the bathroom, constantly for 4 hours. My sister and I looked at each other and thought the same thing. Was he a diabetic? Could it be? Knowing that a fasting blood was the best, I waited until the next morning to take him to the emergency department at our local hospital. Sure enough, he was

diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. What did this mean for him? Would he have a “normal” life? What would our role be as his parents? A regiment followed of taking blood samples and injecting his poor little belly with insulin. What a brave child he was! July turned out to be very busy with two Master courses (assignments due one after the other with many readings in between), relatives from Holland, my brother-in-law and his family making their yearly summer trip back home from China and dealing with my son’s diabetes. Would I survive? Would I have a minute to myself? When would the laundry and the house get cleaned? Was there time for entertaining? I know my mood wasn’t my kind, gentle self. The stress of completing two courses was catching up. I did really like learning about reflective practice and what that really meant. I discovered that I was already reflecting but not in writing. I learned to write my thoughts down.

August was a peaceful month as everyone went back home. I wasn’t going to spend it cleaning and pitching junk. I reflected some more. We decided to travel and had a lot of fun museum hopping in Ottawa. We spent one week fishing and camping and then before we knew it, it was September and off to school again. September brought the usual busyness of a new year, getting to say good-bye to the schools I serviced last year and beginning with the six new ones. I began my third master’s course. I applied for an acting Teacher Consultant role and was successful. My new role would begin the middle of October. October arrived with the fall leaves just turning their bright oranges and reds. Life seemed great. I was writing in my journal and becoming more reflective. Then the call came. My sister’s husband had died. Why? Could it have been prevented? What was our family going to do? What supports needed to be put in place? What about funeral arrangements? This was the beginning of a whirlwind five days of serving twenty plus people food, bringing my sons home from their respective colleges/universities, making sure everyone was taken care of. Wasn’t that my job? Isn’t that a part of who I am? After taking three bereavement days, one personal leave day and a sick day (exhaustion set in), I was off to a wedding with my husband for a relative on his side of the family trying to stay focused. How was I going to handle all that had happened? November arrived with no sign of snow. It was a damp month as the leaves left the trees, leaving them bare, awaiting the beautiful snow cover that would give them some warmth. I was beginning to feel like the trees, bare and exhausted, needing some warmth to carry on. Christmas rolled around with a few snowflakes in the air. We spent Christmas keeping everyone happy as this was the first Christmas without my nephew and brother-in-law. The grief counselors say the firsts are always the hardest after a death; first birthdays, first holidays etc. A whole year had gone by and January 2008, came in on the tail end of a rain storm. I was beginning to feel pulled in so many directions, living in a world of doing for others. It was at this point that I had my own silent meltdown. I felt I couldn’t continue to be everything to everyone. Was I letting everyone down? What kind of person was I turning into? Was I becoming selfish? Reflecting helped me through this time. I backed out of all of my volunteer work. I was a true “conservative” as Margaret Wenthe put in her article *The happiness ... gap*. I was married, worshipped faithfully once a week and volunteered on many committees (Wenthe, 2008). Reflective practice had helped me to understand who I was and who I was becoming.

I wanted to share my newfound knowledge about reflective practice. Even though I used reflective practice more on a personal basis, I was also using it in my professional work. Could I

share my journey through reflective practice and help the teachers whom I service so they could become reflective practitioners? This was my goal.

How am I working with teachers in reflective practice?

Reflective practice can be used anytime, anywhere. I decided to work with teachers at one particular school. I had developed an excellent rapport with them through working with them for the last five years. My kind, gentle, caring manner and my willingness to always help them was a great influence in getting them to return the favour. I began by explaining what reflective practice was.

Reflective practice started by teachers looking at their teaching and seeing how they could improve their practice. Improving their practice was our school board's mantra, through the Ontario Focused Intervention Program (OFIP) and our Assessment for Improvement Project (AIP). Reflective practice was showing up in my work with my schools. Through discussions at monthly Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), teachers developed an activity based on a cluster of expectations from the Ministry of Ontario Language Curriculum. Through discussion, teachers reflected on their work and talked about how their students improved and where they could do better. Reflective practice was in the making.

Cole and Knowles believe that we should know ourselves and that understanding ourselves as teachers, we understand ourselves as persons. Our professional inquiry is also a part of our personal history. We must know who we are. It is the story we tell (Coles & Knowles, 2000, p. 14). Knowing ourselves is the first step in making sense of our teaching. Ghaye and Ghaye calls this reflection-on-practice (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 6). It is this reflection-on-practice that aids us in making sense of our teaching and learning. It is a model where reflection on context leads to reflection on values leads to reflection on practice leads to reflection on improvement and back to reflection on context and around and around we go (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 7). It is cyclical because reflection leads us into new beginnings, we are always learning. It is flexible as there are no right or wrong steps to take, no true beginning. Reflection-on-practice is also focused. It is this focus and true direction where meaningful learning takes place. It is holistic as it links our values with practice and is ever changing (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 6-8). Ghaye and Ghaye talked about the principles of reflective practice and how reflecting helps us as teachers to improve our practice. They developed ten principles that provided a view of a teacher as a reflective practitioner (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 16).

1. Teachers need to have reflective conversations in their schools.
2. Reflective practice comes alive through experience.
3. Through reflective practice we look at our values, professional understandings and practices.
4. We learn to be accountable to ourselves through reflective practice.
5. We learn to make wiser and more ethical professional judgments through reflective practice.
6. If we are committed to reflective practice then we are committed to doing something positive to improve ourselves for our student's benefit.
7. We become critical thinkers through the reflection process.
8. We can reflect on our school culture.

9. Reflective practice links theory and teaching.

10. We learn to reflect on our daily lessons.

I decided to concentrate on the reflective conversation (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 19).

Showing My Video/Power Point

I began my next step by showing the three teachers that I worked with the reflective piece I did last summer. (Duns, 2007) Through their questioning, I found they needed a stepping stone, a model to really understand what I was asking. As part of my course in the summer of 2007, I put together a power point video piece called *I Just Do It! Learning to Know Myself Through Family and Faith, The Value of the Autobiography.* (Appendix 1) This was the beginning of my journey through reflective practice. Les Parrott explained that achievers were often asked, “Where do you get your energy? How do you get so many things done?” People asked the questions because they felt that a person had some hidden energy source or secret to their productivity. Parrott stated that there was no secret or hidden energy source but one word that drives people to do what they do and that word was “passion” (Parrott, 2007, p. 84) I discovered that my passion lay with my family and faith. Brookfield stated that the influences that operate on us are the images, modes, and conceptions of teaching derived from our own experiences as learners (Brookfield, 1995, p. 49). This led me into my next aha moment. Why not interview the three teachers, asking them the question, “Who are you as a teacher?” This was the beginning of my reflective conversation.

Who are you as a teacher?

Cole and Knowles said that the autobiographical inquiry is important as we take what we know from our past, present and what we wish to gain from our future and pull out parts that hold together who we are (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 3). They continued to state that:

“Who we are and come to be as teachers and teacher educators is a reflection of a complex, ongoing process of interaction and interpretation of factors, conditions, opportunities, relationships, and events that take place throughout our lives in all realms of our existence - intellectual, physical, psychological, spiritual, political and social”
(Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 130).

My three teachers were not conducting an autobiography with me but were telling me their reflections of what they brought to their teaching. They brought their experience into their profession. It was these experiences that they reflected on and encompassed what they did in their classrooms. I have known these three teachers for five years. I have seen these teachers grow more in the past two years with the additional support they have received through being an OFIP (Ontario Focused Intervention Program) school in Ontario and with the new delivery of my coaching role. (Prior to this time, during my first two years as a Literacy Coach, our role was to service 15 schools, come in and model lessons, talk with the teachers and perhaps not see them again until the next term. There was no sustainability. If we were lucky, teachers would take what we offered, use it in their classrooms and talk about it when we returned. We were doing

what we thought the teachers might like, not thinking about where the teachers were at in their programming.) The teachers had the opportunity to work closely with the Ministry of Education's Student Achievement Officer and learn from her experience as well. This was very evident in the interview with my three teachers. They really emphasized their own growth in their programming and their own reflective practice through their Professional Learning Communities which was heard in their interviews (to follow later).

I asked my teachers if I could use their names. One said yes and the other two said no. I decided to call my teachers, Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3. The teachers were more than willing to help me with my reflective practice task. I believe it is because of the excellent rapport that I have developed with them, always willing to help them when they needed it. I believe it was their way of thanking me.

My first interview was with Teacher 1. While asking them the questions, we talked about our experiences. The interview was a reflective conversation {("To be called a reflective conversation there needs to be some consideration and questioning of the educational values that the teacher is committed to and tries to live out in their work with the children, staff and significant others that comprise the primary school as a community" (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 20)} about their best practice as a teacher, their values and why they teach the way they do. Below were my questions that I asked the three teachers:

1. Who are you as a teacher?
2. What qualities do you bring into your teaching?
3. Has your teaching changed in the past two years and if so, what have you changed?
4. Have you ever tried journaling?

Interview with Teacher 1

"I have found that I needed to work more on oral communication in my classroom. Through the OFIP/PLC process, I found that I needed to ask my students more oral questions so they can build new vocabulary. I wanted my students to be able to explain why. I also encouraged my students to be respectful, and listen to the person speaking. During centre time, I encouraged them to take turns, show kindness through sharing. These are attributes I value: respect, attentive listener, kindness, sharing. If a Senior Kindergarten student is finished early, I encourage that child to help a Junior Kindergarten students. Since I have a Special Needs child in my room, I have developed my program around him. I reflect on his situation and the supports that he needs. I have found what works for him works for the whole class. I like our Professional Learning Communities. The sharing, the wealth of knowledge, the big ideas I can pull from our Literacy Place Program. I also have learned from going to the Kindergarten Conversations after school, meeting other Kindergarten teachers from Norfolk County. I am open to new ideas that give me strategies so I can improve my teaching so my students can become more competent learners. I have done some journaling in my daybook, writing down whether or not a lesson goes well or not."

Interview with Teacher 2

“As a teacher I bring my faith, values, interest in books and reading to the classroom. Faith and values are intertwined. When growing up, I was taught the “golden rule” - treat others the way you want them to treat you. So in the classroom, I try to get the students to show respect and consideration for others. I remind them that if they can’t think of anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all. It’s important for them to learn to get along with each other and develop the character attributes respect, sharing, cooperation, patience, consideration, skills they need all their lives. I also like to encourage their interest in books and reading. I have learned to be more selective in read-alouds to take into consideration critical literacy, different points of view and integrating read alouds into other subject areas. I like rich texts as they bring new vocabulary and I can ask deeper questions. I like to have a positive environment in my classroom. I encourage my students to do their best. I give positive feedback on their work. I hadn’t thought about using a journal to write my reflective thoughts in. What I have done is write on a sticky note what worked well in a unit and what didn’t and put that sticky in my theme bucket. When I use that unit again, I can change it. That’s about the only reflection I have done. I guess I could try journaling and see how that works.”

Interview with Teacher 3

“I bring a sense of humor to my class. I like to teach using real life situations. I find that my students can relate to real life situations. I am caring and confident. I am a hands on teacher. I feel my students learn better if they can use concrete items to help them. I encourage my students to help each other. Cooperative learning is important to me. I also like a bit of spontaneity in my classroom. I stop when I see my students are not engaged. I have learned that they need frequent breaks between their learning. I like to look at what my students like so I can engage them to their fullest capacity. I am learning how to use different strategies to meet their needs. I have an open communication policy in my room. We often have class discussions using think-pair-share. I bring my enthusiasm to my students and the staff. I am passionate about my students. I am a life long learner and am always trying to read professional text when I find the time. My parents are very supportive and give me that drive to keep learning. I have never tried journaling. I feel I don’t have time for it.”

Reflective Practice in the Making

Teacher 1, 2 and 3 talked about their values. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, p. 9) profoundly stated that values do matter. Values make us the kind of teacher we are and hope to become. We bring our values into our classrooms daily. It is these values that help us to make sound and just decisions with teachers or students that we work with. Our values and our practices are connected. It is the reason for doing things. Each teacher had their own values and it was their values that helped them to make decisions on how to proceed. For example, teacher 1 said that she really takes into account her special needs student. If she can keep him happy and under control, the rest of the class learns. If his behaviour is out of control, she spends more time helping him cope and less time on educating the rest of the class. She has spoken to me about this as she feels that she is letting the rest of the students down. Teacher 1’s values are now coming into her reflective practice and a part of her decision. She is trying to make a wise and principled decision.

Lezotte and McKee (2002) in (Hulley, 2005, p. 153) talk about three curricula that need to be aligned for students to be successful. They talk about the taught curriculum, the assessed curriculum and the intended curriculum. It is the intended curriculum that is hidden curriculum that teachers teach on a daily basis. Henderson defines the hidden curriculum as:

“the aspect of curriculum that is not explicitly stated, but potentially learned by students nonetheless. This hidden curriculum is extremely powerful and contains a large body of knowledge learned by students, such as social and academic groupings and how to follow the rules in the game of schooling. Here, the hidden curriculum often forms student values, attitudes, and assumptions about race, class, gender, ethnicity, and disability” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007, p. 47).

Teacher 2 spoke to the “golden rule” that many of us were taught. This is part of the hidden curriculum, how we want our students to act. It is what we want our students to be. Grand Erie has encompassed this in their Character Attributes Poster found in all working places of the Board. The values that we want our students to have are:

- * Respect
- * Integrity
- * Responsibility
- * Team oriented
- * Perseverance
- * Compassion
- * Humility
- * Inclusiveness

In completing the interview I asked the three teachers if they would be interested in keeping a reflective journal, writing down their thoughts about their day. I explained to them what a reflective journal was using the information from Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, p. 81- 92). We talked about the regularity of writing and what needs to go in. Since this was their first time journaling, I suggested that the reflective journal would be a collection of anecdotes. Personal anecdotes are experiences and so have a true value to them. I wrote in my reflective journal as well. Here are two of my entries:

“Today I met with my group of teachers. We had to work around their play day time. I managed to see everyone. I really liked the way the teachers were so comfortable talking with me. I wrote their comments down and read them back to them. We talked some more about using a reflective journal or just writing in their daybook. I just wanted to make it simple for them.

“My paper is coming along well. I just hope I have included everything that I need. I wonder if my teachers will continue to write reflectively. I wonder if they mind if I keep in contact with them next year and see if the process continues.”

I believe I fulfilled my question, “How can I encourage teachers to use reflective practice in their teaching?” I accomplished this by modeling (talking to them about my experience), sharing (showed them my journal and what I was writing about), guiding (talking to them about journaling and the benefits for themselves and their students) and then independently (did they complete a journal on their own). The gradual release of responsibility worked well.

After one week from being away from this school, I went for a visit to see how things were going. I was elated as I walked by teacher 1’s classroom and she shouted out to me, “I have been journaling this week.” Wow! It worked! I figure one out of three isn’t bad. Once I got settled, I proceeded to visit teacher 2 and teacher 3 who said that they had thought about journaling but hadn’t found the time yet. As I was talking with teacher 2 and 3 in the staff room, teacher 1 came in with a big smile, holding her journal. She was the leader and encouraging them to reflect in their journals. I reflected in my own journal:

“This is a staff that works well together. There were many words of encouragement going around. What a positive atmosphere to work in! I felt proud of Teacher 1 for sharing so openly her excitement and enthusiasm. She was explaining how it made her feel and that she could see how her practice could change with more entries. My goal is to continue to encourage her to write often. I know she has a new challenge this year and I believe that reflecting on her job will help her to be even a better teacher. “

In conclusion, I felt encouraged to go on. Next week is my last week of being in my current position. I am going to take some time to share what I have been working on and encourage my fellow colleagues to begin doing some reflective journaling. It will be a part of me, my legacy, that I leave behind. I’d like to finish with a quote from Maxine Greene (1978, p. 25) that I found in an article from last summer, *Researching Teaching* by Cole and Knowles. It sums up beautifully where my project will take me. Maxine writes:

“Each of us achieved contact with the world from a particular vantage point, in terms of a particular autobiography. All of this underlies our present perspective and affects the way we look at things and talk about things and structure our realities. This is the premise from which we work when we encourage teachers to explore their teaching and themselves as teachers.” (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 5)

My journey through reflective practice continues!

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What is the nature of my influence as an educator and how can I use that influence to improve my ability to support teachers in their use of Premier assistive technology during provincial assessments and in regular classroom lessons?

Theresa MacDougald

Principles and Passions

Aspire to inspire before you expire

(Sign posted outside the Evangelical Church on Fairview Drive in Brantford, Ontario)

We are all good people

In order to understand this research study it is important to understand the principles that are the stones of my professional foundation. Jean McNiff states that “in action research reports, the content is about accounting for oneself through a process of showing the validity of the works as it links ... with realizing the researcher’s guiding values” (p. 319). My most predominant guiding principle is ‘we are all good people’. My husband coined this phrase. This principle helps me to remember that all people, children and adults alike, are striving for goodness; are striving to make sense of the world around them; are striving for their best way, their right way, their ‘truth’. It reminds me that although people have differing opinions and perspectives, that all people are inherently good. It reminds me that although people may not see my perspective or share my passion that they are acting with good intention.

I am not exactly sure when my love affair with special needs’ students began but I know that the principle that ‘we are all good people’ is what drew me to them. From my very first days of teaching I was always observing and asking questions about the ones who were not ‘getting it’; the ones who were not succeeding. Although they were not good students (as it pertains to begin able to meet curriculum expectations), I knew in my heart that they were good people and that there had to be more to teaching than separating those who can from those who can not. I strived to see the goodness in all my students regardless of their academic ability and I made it my goal that each child would know that I believed in him/her and that he/she was valued as a person. I made it my goal to stand in front of a classroom of children and see people first and students second.

In the early 1990’s I became aware of the work of David Gardner and his notion of Multiple Intelligences. “Gardner viewed intelligence as the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting” (Smith,2002, p.3). Using biological as well as cultural research, he developed a list of seven intelligences. Traditional views of intelligence recognized only two intelligences: verbal and computational (Brualdi,1996, p.1). Gardner’s work began to expand my thinking about why some students were not successful in their learning at school. It reinforced my belief that we are all good people and that we are thinking and learning in different ways that require different methods of instruction and varying

ways of expressing our knowledge and understanding. Perhaps children were experiencing difficulty at school because they possessed an intelligence that didn't mesh with the instructional practice of the classroom. Affected by Gardner's work, I began to offer my students varying ways of showing and expressing their learning.

In the late 1990's I was introduced to the work of Richard Lavoie while taking an additional qualification's course for teachers in Special Education. Lavoie had done extensive work with students with learning disabilities and was advocating for accommodations for these students to remove the barriers and challenges that their learning disability cause them. Students with learning disabilities are often judged as lazy, unmotivated and even stupid. Lavoie talked about making learning fair for these students and that fairness did not mean sameness. Lavoie is best known for the following statement: "Fairness does not mean that everyone gets the same thing. Fairness means that everyone gets what they need." Lavoie's notion of fairness versus sameness reinforced once again that my students were all good people who simply required different methods and tools to be successful at school. The accommodations that can be provided to students with learning challenges allow their goodness to come out.

The work of Dr. Mel Levine and the professional development training for teachers called Schools Attuned helped to further solidify my beliefs in the inherent goodness of all my students. Dr. Levine's work, based on brain research and brain development, opened my eyes to the many neurodevelopmental functions that are required to complete school tasks. In his book, *Educational Care* (2002), Dr. Levine states: "Needless suffering occurs whenever children grow up disappointing themselves and the adults who care about them. Often they do so because they perform inadequately in school. Unfortunately, these children come to question their own worthiness, as they gaze about and compare themselves to others. Often they conceal profound concerns about their minds, believing that somehow they are defective or inferior. We are describing the sad plight of children who have difficulty performing certain highly age-specific roles that are needed to keep pace with the demands imposed in school. These young students often create confusion in their parents and their teachers"(p. 1). Reading Dr. Levine's book made me realize that this principle of 'we are all good people' was one that I not only had to aspire to myself but that I also had to teach to my students. It was my job as an educator to teach my students to believe that they were worthy, good people and to teach them to see their fellow students in the same light.

The Schools Attuned programme is based on nine guiding principles which encourage educators to appreciate the diversity in all their students. The principles encourage educators to achieve a high level of specificity in our understanding of children's strengths and weaknesses; to label observable phenomena rather than children; to help learners learn about learning and to infuse optimism for kids with all kinds of minds. As I completed the Schools Attuned training I felt assured that my own guiding principle was completely in-line with those of the programme. I also realized that as a Special Education leader in my school I needed to teach other educators to view the special needs' students in our school as diverse people worthy of respect and understanding. It was at this point in my educational career that I realized that part of my job was to use my influence, passion and principles to help educators to see special needs' students through a different lens.

Teaching them to fish

At the time that I completed my Schools Attuned training (2004 – 2005) I was a Learning Resource Teacher at my school. In my role I spent a good deal of my time trying to remediate reading and writing skills in students who were not meeting grade level expectations in the Language curriculum. I was amazed at how much effort these students would put into sounding out words, decoding words, spelling words and getting proper sentences down on paper with often dismal results. I could see where the constructs of memory, language and grapho-motor skills that the Schools Attuned program spoke about were breaking down in these students. I was also struck by how dependent these students were on me, their classroom teacher or educational assistant to complete school work. Because of their learning disability they were totally dependent learners.

It was around this same time that I began to explore various computer software programs that had become available in my school. These programs were called assistive technology because they were designed to help bypass reading and writing difficulties that students might have. I specifically began to investigate text-to-speech software called Kurzweil and word prediction software called Co:Writer. As I trained students to use these assistive technologies I was amazed at how quickly they learned to use them and how the technology helped them to become more independent in their reading and writing. I saw this as a real life testimony to what Richard Lavoie has spent his life advocating for. These assistive technologies represented a fair yet different approach to reading and writing for these students with learning challenges. I conducted my first Action Research Project that year entitled: “How can I enable and support students and teachers with implementing Co:Writer word prediction software in their regular writing program?” (McDougald, 2006, p. 97). It was through that research that I became convinced that assistive technology could turn frustrated and dependent learners into motivated, independent learners. I remember thinking of the Chinese proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life” Instead of feeding my students a diet of flashcards, decoding exercises and spelling drills to remediate weaknesses in language, memory and graphomotor skills, the assistive technology was allowing the students to bypass these weaknesses and giving them the tools and skills they needed to become independent readers and writers. It was as if the students had been handed a fishing pole and a bucket of worms. They were learning to fish and nourish themselves academically.

My action research had another focus as well. I was convinced of the benefits of assistive technology for students, but were their teachers convinced? If they were convinced, were they able to include the use of assistive technology into their regular practice? I wanted teachers to become independent in their use of the technology and to promote its benefits to their students. How was I going to inspire teachers to explore and trust the technology and to develop a desire to want to investigate the use of assistive technology in their classrooms? I wanted them to learn to fish in the assistive technology waters, not rely totally on me to provide all the instruction and support for assistive technology. My research showed me that the gradual release of responsibility model that we use with students is the model that works best for teachers too. Teachers needed modeling, coaching and encouragement with learning how to use the

technology. They needed to be shown what a difference it made in the students' school work and the teachers needed to be shown how it connected to what they were teaching in the classroom. The outcome of my first action research project was a new professional quest-an investigation into how I influence others to change their practice. How does one influence and inspire another?

Inculcate by precept and example

I have never been a person who likes to tell others what to do. I have never been a person who professed to know the best way of doing something. I always felt that one was better off to just live what you believed and the joy and happiness that oozed out of you was going to catch people's attention. I found that although there were always students in my classes that were not interested or motivated to learn what I may be teaching, I did a better job of reaching them through listening to them and encouraging them than I did by forcing them to do things they didn't want to do. I found that compromise and flexibility got me further ahead than did confrontation and force.

In 2007, I began to explore the characteristics of adult learning and constructivist learning theory when I became involved in an Instructional Leadership course offered by my Board and I also was learning coaching techniques and how they applied to my new role as a System Learning Resource Teacher. In 2008, I had the opportunity to train to become a facilitator for the Schools Attuned program. During my facilitator's training I read an article called *The Zen of Facilitation* by Joellen P. Killion and Lynn A. Simmons (1992). In the article, Killion and Simmons outline that facilitators "model attitudes and behaviour. Group members' attitudes and behaviours are strongly influenced by the facilitator's attitudes and behaviours. When the facilitator models the productive behaviours of respectful listening, maintaining personal safety, honoring various perspectives, sharing, trusting, risk-taking, and disclosing, then group members will mirror these behaviours. Through this process, a nurturing environment emerges" (p. 5). When I read this passage I was brought back to a phrase that I read in *The Education Act* during my year at Teacher's College - inculcating by precept and example-that we lead by modeling the attitudes and behaviours we would like to see in others.

Killion and Simmons (1992) quote Heider in their article, "Remember that you are facilitating another person's process. It is not your process. Do not intrude. Do not control. Do not force your own needs and insights into the foreground. If you do not trust a person's process, that person will not trust you"(p. 3). This quote struck me because my new teaching role required that I work collaboratively with classroom teachers to facilitate them in differentiating their instruction for their students with special learning needs. I was learning quickly that trust was of the utmost importance and that I couldn't force ideas or strategies on a teacher but I instead had to listen and ask good questions that allowed the classroom teacher to deepen his/her understanding of the student's needs and what might be needed to improve the student's learning. I realized that I had to lead by letting the teacher go first.

As I began my role as System Learning Resource Teacher I was asked to read *The Literacy Coach's Survival Guide* (2005) as an introduction to the notions of coaching and adult learning.

In her book, Cathy Toll outlines the role of the 'coach' in this way: "Coaching supports significant change because it provides a foundation for teacher reflection, action research, collaboration, and informed decision making, all of which can lead to significant educational change....coaching is not about telling others what to do, but rather bringing out the best in others" (p. 6).

It seems that the literature and experiences I have been exposed to over the past two years are really highlighting my deeply grounded principle of leading by precept and example. Interestingly enough, I found leading by precept and example a much easier task with students than I am finding it with the teachers that I work with. Somehow it was much easier and felt more natural to 'let my beacon shine' with the students than it is with adults. It has been the most difficult challenge to live my principle of leading by example and trusting in the wisdom of the learner when that learner is an adult. I find myself continually questioning the depth and impact of my influence on the classroom teachers with whom I collaborate.

The following action research attempts to investigate a particular aspect of my teaching practice and attempts to assess whether I have honestly embedded the aforementioned principles into that practice. It is my hope that through this investigation I will come to a deeper understanding of how my principles allow me to influence and inspire fellow educators in their learning.

My Present Context:

I am an educator with a mid-sized school board located in South Western Ontario, Canada called The Grand Erie District School Board. My role is one of Primary System Learning Resource Teacher for Special Education. I have a family of schools comprised of 17 elementary schools that I am available to support. My role is to assist classroom teachers in differentiating instruction for students in regular classroom placements with unique learning needs. This year I have also begun to assist teachers of special education classes with differentiated instruction for students of junior and intermediate age. "Differentiated instruction tells teachers how to teach (curriculum) to a range of learners by employing a variety of teaching approaches" (Ontario Ministry of Education, p. 14). Many of the referrals I receive ask that I assist the teacher and students in becoming familiar with the many different kinds of computer-based assistive technologies that are now licensed by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and how these technologies can be used by the students to access curriculum either at grade level or at a modified grade level, depending on the needs of the student.

The Ministry of Education Context:

The use of assistive technology is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education in their Expert Panel Report on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 entitled Education For All (2005). Chapter 10 is dedicated to describing what assistive technology is and isn't and its benefits for children with special learning needs.

Assistive technology plays an important role in the provision of instruction based on universal design. In a universally designed classroom, teachers can provide students with the tools necessary to adapt methods and materials to their individual needs, flexible goals for learning, and continuous assessment (Hitchcock, 2001). Teachers can support all students with equitable access to all aspects of the learning experience—equal access to the curriculum where this would otherwise be not possible or very difficult and equal access to the tools needed to access the curriculum. The positive impacts of assistive technology on the development of even very young children are demonstrable (Judge, 2001). (p. 127)

In May of 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education also released a document entitled Special Education Transformation, The report of the Co-Chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education. This report provides some clear goals and directions for schools with respect to their special needs' students. Two particular goals are student success and access to curriculum as well as professional development for teachers that will increase capacity of all staff to educate a wider range of learners. The report describes specific topics for this professional development: "Topics would include universal design, differentiated instruction, effective teaching and curriculum-based assessment strategies, collaborative problem-solving approaches and assistive technology" (p. 27).

Current Research on Assistive Technology and Reading and Learning Disabilities

Assistive technology that addresses reading difficulties is usually text-to-speech software or speech synthesizers which "are basically screen readers. They read text that is displayed on the computer monitor, allowing students to gain independent access to assignments, books and research."(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p.130). The Education For All document highlights that research from the past 15 years is beginning to show what benefits this kind of assistive technology is having on reading fluency and comprehension for people who have reading disabilities.

The research demonstrates that OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and speech synthesis reduce frustration in decoding and allow for more complete comprehension of text (Lundberg, 1995; Montali & Lewandowski, 1996).

In addition, several researchers have noted that the use of this technology can actually improve word-recognition and decoding skills (e.g., Higgins & Raskind, 2000; Olson & Wise, 1992; Torgesen & Barker, 1995). One longitudinal study in particular (Lundberg) demonstrated improved word recognition and spelling in

students with lower scores in these areas as compared with a control group not supported by computer use.

For students who can handle the content of any given subject or course, the use of OCR and speech synthesis allows them to access the print in textbooks, and thereby the curriculum, in a way that would otherwise be more difficult, if not impossible. It may even increase student motivation to read (Montali & Lewandowski, 1996).” (Ontario Ministry of Education, p.131)

Marshall H. Raskind, Ph.D., is a learning disability researcher. He is well-known for his research in assistive technology and longitudinal studies tracing Learning Disabilities across the lifespan. On the website for Schwablearning, Raskind has written a summary of current peer-reviewed research. In his article, Raskind (2005) states,

Fortunately, the acceptance of OCR as a viable assistive technology of LD is based on both a strong theoretical framework, as well as several studies directly investigating the technology’s efficacy in compensating for the reading difficulties experienced by individuals with LD. The idea that converting text to speech may help reading comprehension is suggested from research in reading disabilities...Although phonological awareness may be poor there is also evidence that individuals with reading disabilities often exhibit no apparent difficulties in understanding spoken language. Considering that persons with LD have difficulty with decoding print, yet may not have difficulty with oral language, it is not difficult to see how OCR systems that convert printed text to the spoken word might enhance reading comprehension.

Perhaps the strongest support for the idea that OCR combined with speech synthesis can help compensate for reading problems comes from those studies that directly investigated the technology. Elkind, Cohen & Murray found that most of the children enhanced their reading comprehension scores while using an OCR system. In a subsequent study of adults with reading disabilities, Elkind, Black & Murray showed enhanced performance in reading speed and endurance when using OCR as compared to reading unaided.

Similarly, Higgins & Raskind, in a study of postsecondary students with LD, found that severely disabled readers improved reading comprehension scores when using OCR. In addition, they found an “inverse correlation” between silent reading without assistance and reading with an OCR system, such that, the greater the severity of the reading disability, the more the technology elevated reading comprehension scores.

The most recent research in this area comes from a recently published study conducted by my colleague, Eleanor Higgins, and me. We researched a handheld OCR device for persons with reading difficulties...This handheld unit would be used to read aloud only single words rather than connected text. Results of the study indicated that students with reading disabilities aged 10 – 18 performed

significantly better in reading comprehension tasks when using the device as compared to reading without it.” (p. 1-2)

The Grand Erie District School Board Context:

As part of its 2007-2008 Operating Plan, The Grand Erie District School Board included as a major area of focus to improve engagement and achievement of students using assistive technology. The Board also purchased the license for Premier Assistive Technology which provides text-to-speech software and word prediction software as well as a talking word processor. With this license the Board was now able to offer universal access of assistive technology to all students in the Board. In January 2008, the System Learning Resource Teacher for Assistive Technology began training sessions throughout the Board in order to introduce classroom teachers, principals, resource teachers and support staff to the new Premier Technology. At the January 2008 System Special Education meeting, all support staff were encouraged by our Principal Leader to be assisting schools in implementation of Premier in their classrooms and to be encouraging schools to include special needs’ students who are well trained in using assistive technology in the 2008 Education Quality and Accountability Office provincial assessment (EQAO). At this time the Premier software was loaded on to the laptop computers we use as System Learning Resource Teachers so that we would have access to it to become familiar with the Premier programs.

EQAO and Assistive Technology

Each year in May and June, elementary students in Grade 3 and Grade 6 participate in the Provincial EQAO assessment of reading, writing and mathematics.

On January 30, 2008, the Education Quality and Accountability Office put out the Guide for Accommodations, a Special Provision and Exemptions- Support for Students with Special Education Needs and English-Language Learners (www.eqao.com). On page 2, presentation formats of the assessment were outlined. “Access would be granted at the school level to a Premier downloadable electronic version.” On page 6, a note in bold print reads: “Any accommodation(s) provided to a student during the primary or junior division assessment must be consistent with normal classroom practice and all forms of testing, including summative assessments, for that student”.

Although the timelines were tight, by the beginning of February 2008 I was wondering how many of the schools I serve would be excited about trying to prepare their special needs students to use Premier text –to- speech capabilities to complete their EQAO assessment?

How Strong is the Assistive Technology Chain? Are There Any Missing Links?

So in the chain of assistive technology where were the missing links? As I cited previously, The Ontario Ministry of Education document, Education For All, outlined research from the past 15 years suggesting that text to speech software (OCR and speech synthesis) improves the reading comprehension of people with learning disabilities. The Ontario Ministry of Education encourages the use of varying forms of assistive technology including speech synthesis and OCR in Ontario classrooms. The Education Quality and Assessment Office supports the use of assistive technology during Grade 3 and Grade 6 Provincial testing by providing electronic versions of the assessment which can be used with various text to speech software. The school Board for which I work purchased a Board license for text to speech software which is accessible to every student in the Board and offered many training sessions each week for educators to attend and to learn the basics of the technology. So it would seem that those outside of the classroom were convinced of the usefulness of assistive technology as it pertains to achievement for students with reading and learning disabilities. It would seem that one end of the chain was well linked, but what about the other end of the chain? What about the people inside the classrooms? I began to suspect that the missing links to the assistive technology chain were going to be found at that end. I began to wonder and question the following: What do I think classroom teachers are thinking and feeling about the technology that is now available to them and their students? What might be the barriers to using the technology? Would teachers be ready and willing to begin the journey of exploring the technology and its useful for their students? Will teachers know or understand how the technology can be integrated into their daily practice? Will teachers be willing and able to ask for the help they might need to integrate the technology into their practice? Will teachers believe in the value of the technology? Will I be skilled enough to support teachers in their use of the technology? How will we know if the technology is really improving reading comprehension for students with reading and learning disabilities?

There were a lot of questions swimming around inside my head. It seemed to me that some of these questions really spoke to my being a link in the chain that definitely needed strengthening but also that somehow I needed to find a way to strengthen the teacher links otherwise it would be the students that would fall.

Strengthening My Link: Getting Familiar with Premier

In January 2008, the four Primary System Learning Resource Teachers for Special Education began to explore Premier assistive technology in depth. We would email and/or meet at our office bi-weekly to discuss any problems we were noticing and to decide how we would best help teachers and students get ready to use Premier for the May 2008 EQAO Assessment. One of our first issues was that although Premier is a text to speech reader you have to have a text for it to read. Most classrooms are not equipped with a scanner that could scan a book or a worksheet that the student might be given to complete. So we brainstormed ideas of how teachers and students could access texts to read from the internet or from the Student Link that is available from the Grand Erie Board website. Student Link is a website that is organized by grade. It is a large database of secure, safe websites that students can visit. The websites are

organized by grade and subject. We began to in-service classrooms with a simple lesson whereby students and teachers were taught to enter into the appropriate grade level in Student Link, pick a text to read and then how to access the Universal Reader from the Premier Tools, highlight the text and have it read to them.

Our second problem arose with the highlighting. Sometimes the Universal Reader would recognize the text and read it and other times it would claim that there was nothing to read. The student would then have to go back, re-highlight and try again. Sometimes it could take up to three tries before the Universal Reader would do its job.

Other frustrations encountered were with scanners hooked up to classroom computers. The format of the text did not always stay the same when it was scanned and then read by Premier. Texts that had a lot of pictures, graphics, or tables were re-formatted and often looked quite different from the original text that was scanned. We began to worry how the students were going to complete the EQAO assessment which often has texts with picture and graphics. It was back to more trial and error.

We emailed people in the Board that we knew were experimenting with Premier on a regular basis. Germaine Glaves, System Learning Resource Teacher for Assistive Technology, provided helpful feedback. She explained that PDF Equalizer, one of the Premier tools, would read PDF files. This was good news because I knew that the EQAO website contained examples of past assessments and they were in PDF format. I experimented one day and was pleased to discover that I could download the PDF version to any school computer and save it in the SShare drive, which is a drive that is accessible to all students through their personal login. The format of the text looked exactly like an EQAO assessment and all one had to do to have the text read was to highlight the text and it would read automatically.

I felt for the first time since early January that I had the knowledge and skills I needed to help my schools prepare their students for using the Premier technology to complete the EQAO assessment in the best way possible- where the look of the text would be exactly as it appears in the test booklet and where getting the technology to read the text was the simplest way possible.

So now it was up to me to get out into the schools and strengthen the next and most important link in the chain. Would the teachers be ready to hear and see what I had to show them about the Premier program and EQAO?

Beliefs and Data Gathering:

As I made my visits to my schools I was doing so with some strong beliefs in my mind. Firstly, I felt that some schools would request electronic versions for their students but that the staff and students in the school probably did not have a strong working knowledge of Premier. I was aware that some staff would have attended the 2 hour Premier training workshop but that they would not feel competent to teach the Premier program to their students or would not find the time to do so. Secondly, I believed that most staff would not have a working knowledge of how an electronic version of a text is downloaded, saved to a secure drive on the computer network or

which Premier tool would be the best to choose to have the text read to them. Thirdly, I suspected that there would be frustrations around certain aspects of the Premier technology and computer skills in general.

So I decided that I would ask three questions as I visited my schools: 1. Do you plan to have students use Premier assistive technology for the EQAO assessment? 2. Have you ordered the electronic version from the EQAO's Student Data Collection system? 3. Are you and your students independent in the use of Premier assistive technology? It is with these questions that I began data collection for this educational inquiry.

My data sources come from three schools in my family of schools. I have assigned each school a letter A, B and C so as to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. The data was collected through dialogue, co-teaching experiences, observation, personal journal entries and email correspondence. The teachers involved have given signed, written consent for me to report and interpret the data. Each teacher agreed to provide written feedback after the EQAO experience. See Appendix A and B for the written consent form and the teacher questionnaire that the teachers completed after the EQAO assessment (Early June, 2008).

Initial Data Gathering:

Questions	School A	School B	School C
Have you ordered an electronic version for the EQAO Assessment?	I received an email from School A asking for assistance to make sure the school was ordering the electronic version properly “need to order special versions by Feb. 29 th . What is the version called?” (email, Feb, 22, 2008)	April 16 conversation: electronic versions had been ordered	April 15 email indicated electronic versions had been ordered.
How many students will be using assistive technology? Grade 3. Grade 6	Grade 3 (two students) Grade 6 (one student)	Grade 3 (three students)	Grade 3 (four students)
Do you plan to use Premier assistive technology?	Intending to use Premier for the two Grade 3 students	Intending to use Premier with Grade 3 students	Intending to use Premier with Grade 3 students

<p>Do you and your students know how to use Premier?</p> <p>Do you feel confident on how to use Premier assistive technology for the EQAO assessment?</p>	<p>Teacher has had training but did not feel confident. Students had not yet been introduced to Premier</p>	<p>Teacher had attended Premier training. Students had not yet been introduced to Premier</p>	<p>Teacher had attended Premier training. Email states: “Have a number of students who could use your expertise to learn how to use assistive technology for Grade 3 assessment” (email, April 15, 2008).</p>
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This preliminary data seemed to support my original beliefs. The good news was that schools were taking the plunge into assistive technology. By ordering the electronic version for their students they were trying to give those students every possible chance to show their knowledge and do as well as they could during the EQAO assessment. The not so good news was that although these students had Individual Education Plans that indicated they had access to assistive technology for assessment, the reality was that these students had not even begun to explore the technology let alone use it for classroom assessments. This posed for me an ethical dilemma. The EQAO Guide for Accommodations, a Special Provision and Exemptions, clearly states that schools must “permit only the accommodations...that the students regularly receive for classroom tests.” (p. 2). How could I appease my conscience around this issue? I insisted that if the schools wanted my assistance that they were going to have to agree to have the students and any other teachers or Educational Assistants involved during the EQAO assessment participate in several mini-training sessions. This would by no means constitute regular classroom use but it would ease my conscience a bit that I had done the best I could to prepare the students for the EQAO assessment. It would also hopefully build some capacity and expertise in each of the three schools. It would also hopefully allow the staff to see the benefits of the technology and hopefully plant a seed for the regular use of the technology in the classroom.

Planting seeds, building capacity and being influential

I began the Premier training sessions in the three schools the week of April 21st. These sessions included showing students how to use the PDF Equalizer tool in Premier; how to open a PDF file from the Student Drive (SShare Drive); how to highlight text and have it read; how to choose an appropriate voice for the “reader” and an appropriate reading rate. For these sessions, students practiced completing the 2007 EQAO Language assessment which I downloaded to the SShare Drive. The students practiced listening to a text and then listening to and answering multiple choice and short answer questions. The following data represents my observations as well as student and teacher comments about Premier assistive technology. This data supports my beliefs and claims that staff and students were not yet independent users of Premier technology; that there would be frustrations around certain aspects of the Premier program and that schools would require support in downloading the 2008 EQAO assessments to their school computers.

Data Gathered during student and teacher training sessions (by school, student and teacher)

Issues	School A Students	School A Teacher
Ability to use PDF Equalizer after training	<p><u>Student 1</u> independently logs in and sets up PDF Equalizer, Opens practice assessment from SShare Drive, highlights and listens to text; re-listens to sections of text to understand; needs prompts to return to section of text that question is referring to.</p> <p><u>Student 2</u> has difficulty typing in login correctly; independently sets up PDF Equalizer but requires prompts to Open up practice assessment from the SShare; highlights and listens to text; re-listens to sections of text to understand; returns to sections of text that question is referring to; uses both electronic version and booklet to check answers and refer to text</p>	<p>Able to assist students after second session without my help.</p> <p>Shared input with me for voice selection and reading rate.</p> <p>Pleasantly surprised that Student 1 was “re-reading” text without prompts. Questions whether Student 2 is a good candidate for the assistive technology. (McDougald, personal journal, May 20, 2008).</p> <p>Expresses her concern that she still wants support during the EQAO assessment period because technical problems will likely happen “technical problems are the norm” (McDougald, personal journal, May 23, 2008).</p>
Technical frustrations	<p>Student 2 was quite sensitive to the feel of the headset on her head.</p> <p>Both students recognize that the word “favourite” is non pronounced properly by the</p>	<p>Teacher questions why each word was not highlighted individually when read as is the case when using other Premier tools (McDougald, personal</p>

	text reader.	journal, May 20, 2008).
Required assistance to download 2008 EQAO electronic versions of assessment		Teacher asks for help to download the Premier version to the SShare. We sit together and she assists as we trouble shoot how to do this. (McDougald, personal journal, May 26, 2008).

Issues	School B Students	School B Teacher
Ability to use PDF Equalizer after training	Three students could independently log in and set up PDF Equalizer during the second session <u>Student 1</u> told me that he had done individual practice using Premier during his classroom computer time (between session 1 and session 2) (McDougald, personal journal, May 12, 2008).	Teacher watched my lessons and assisted students with reminders to highlight small parts of text to listen to and to return to parts of the text referred to in the questions.
Technical Frustrations	None reported	None reported
Required assistance to download 2008 EQAO electronic versions of assessment		Teacher asked that I download 2008 assessment to the SShare. "I'm so glad you're here. I would have been in a panic to do this." (McDougald, personal journal, May 28, 2008).

Issues	School C Students	School C Teacher
Ability to use PDF Equalizer after training	Four out of five of the students can independently login and set up PDF Equalizer by the second lesson. (McDougald, personal journal, May 14, 2008). <u>Student 4</u> tells me "I'm starting to get this now. They use parts of the story in the question. I can go back to the story and find that part." (McDougald, personal journal, May 21, 2008).	Teacher practices using PDF Equalizer on a computer herself while students practice. Teacher asks for assistance on how to download PDF files from the EQAO website and then practices herself. (McDougald, personal journal, May 7, 2008). Teacher works with students several times on her own between session 1 and 2. At

		session 3, she has students working in PDF Equalizer as well as having a hardcopy of the practice test in front of them. The students practiced filling in their multiple choice answers on the hard copy, just like they will for the actual EQAO assessment.
Technical Frustrations	<u>Student 4</u> is very bothered by the voices and the feel of the headset on his head. (McDougald, personal journal, May 7, 2008). By the third session he has solved his issues by resting the headset on his shoulders and increasing the volume so that he can hear the voice. (McDougald, personal journal, May 21, 2008). He has chosen Microsoft Sam as the most tolerable voice.	Frustrated that the PDF Equalizer won't read the title of the text because the font style is different from the body of the text. She hopes this doesn't happen during the EQAO assessment. (McDougald, personal journal, May 21, 2008).
Required assistance to download 2008 EQAO electronic versions of assessment		I received an urgent email from the administrator "I have downloaded the Premier version of the test but do not know how to get it into Premier or what the Board standard will be for making it accessible to the students". (email, May 26, 2008).

As the EQAO testing period approached for the three schools I was feeling fairly confident that I had done a good job preparing both the students and the teachers to use the assistive technology for the EQAO assessment. I was confident that the students and teachers were better prepared than they would have been if I hadn't assisted them. I was feeling confident that all of the children would fair better on the assessment using the Premier technology that they would without it. But what did the teachers think? If my role as a System Learning Resource Teacher is to build capacity in teachers to differentiate instruction (and assessment) for students with learning challenges, had I done my job? I need a way to assess whether I had in fact increased that capacity of the teachers to use and appreciate the assistive technology. All three teachers agreed to provide written feedback to me after the EQAO assessment was complete.

I also wanted to gather feedback from the students through oral question and answer, to get their impressions of what it was like to complete the assessment using the technology and how they think it helped them and any difficulties or frustrations they experienced with the technology. I gathered the student data while I was assisting with the EQAO assessments. Once the EQAO assessments were completed by the end of the first week in June, I asked the teachers to complete the written feedback. I then analyzed the two sets of data to see if there was proof of

change in teacher practice and beliefs; what my influence was in that change and whether we could begin to gauge any improvement in student reading achievement.

Student Comments about Premier and EQAO

After each day of testing I asked the students about how they were feeling about the testing and how using the computer was helping them. The following is a compilation of their oral comments:

“I am happy because I used to be nervous, nervous that I wasn’t going to get things right. The computer is helping me by reading the questions but it doesn’t tell me the answers.”

“I need to read the questions over again because sometimes I forget what it said.”

“Using the computer is good because I can’t read so good. I can read the big words with the computer.”

“I re-read the questions until I understood them.”

“Nobody has to read to me. I can do it myself [with the computer]. (McDougald, personal journal, May 27 – June 3, 2008)

I was in awe of how articulate the students were. Their responses reinforced my past experience in my Co:Writer research. The technology increased their confidence. They enjoyed the independence that the technology gave them. What I most enjoyed were their comments about using the technology to re-read text and questions. This is exactly what good readers do and exactly what these students have not previously been able to do. Their efforts to re-read the text proves to me that they were motivated to understand the text and to find information and details to complete the questions. Reading had become for them a task to find out information and to learn more. It was no longer a difficult and frustrating task that ended in disappointment with nothing new learned.

Looking at the Data from the Teacher Questionnaire

Question	School A	School B	School C
Since our work together, how often have you used Premier Assistive Technology?	None	Minimal use- when classes go to the computer lab	I taught a grade 4 student who has a reading disability how to use it for a research assignment
In what ways was my support helpful in preparing you and your students for the	1. Understanding and demonstrating how ‘Equalizer’ option works on Premier	Very helpful -Training students -Downloading test materials	Your support was obviously helpful in teaching me

EQAO assessment?	2. Most importantly- opening (unzipping), copying and saving the various versions to the school computer and individual laptops for both grade 3 and grade 6 students.	-Monitoring accommodations during assessment -Troubleshooting when something went wrong -Flexible (assisting students who came late) -Always good to work with someone who knows more about technology than me	how to use the technology.
Do you feel your students performed better on the assessment using Premier Assistive Technology than they would have if they had not used it?	Yes, I believe they performed better -more opportunities for re-reading -focus on comprehension rather than de-coding -individual note taking after listening/reading a passage	-assurance that the passage and questions were read correctly to allow for optimal comprehension -audio and visual for different kinds of minds	Yes. The students who used the technology would not have been able to read the text without it and in turn would not have been able to answer the questions. The students using the technology were engaged and even motivated during the test. They did not get frustrated and they attempted all the questions.
What further support, knowledge or skills would you need to integrate Premier Assistive Technology into your regular practice?	I think a practical hands-on experience is best. Planning a unit (or individual lessons) and then being shown how Premier will assist and benefit students (helping them meet the required expectations.	Teachers find it hard, time consuming, to plan activities for use with Premier in all subject areas. Time is needed to become familiar and self-confident with use of assistive technology	I would like to receive training on how to incorporate the technology into a regular classroom setting that includes

	Teachers need demonstrations showing how technology can be used to save time, money (paper), effort and gives students what they need. It is a help rather than a frustration as part of their teaching strategies.	There needs to be someone out there “to drive the engine” for us. Keeping us aware of changes, glitches, new software and applying to what we are doing in the classroom and offering support.	students with a varying range of academic abilities.
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Interpretation of Teacher Questionnaire Data

The teacher questionnaire data supports my claim that I felt that teachers and students were well prepared to use Premier technology to complete the EQAO assessment. The fact that they could articulate specific skills that I supported them with convinces me that they are much more technologically aware of the basic components of the Premier technology. I was especially pleased to read that all three teachers were convinced that their students had performed better on the assessment using the technology than they would have if they had not used it. I am beginning to see that my influence in my System Learning Resource Teacher role is actually affecting student achievement. On Friday, May 30, 2008 I received the following email from the teacher of school A: “Hi Theresa, I just wanted to let you know about an exciting thing I observed [student 2] do yesterday during EQAO Language 2 (reading section). After he listened to the computer read each paragraph of a reading section, he jotted down notes on a scrap piece of paper to help him answer the questions afterward. He referred to his notes while orally answering the questions and I could use his spelling of the words right from the get go. He initiated this entirely on his own! He and [student 1] were so independent and confident by yesterday. It was amazing!” When I am working with teachers and students, showing them how the Premier technology works and watching the students using it successfully, I get very excited. The tone of this email was one of excitement, optimism and hope. I believe that I am influencing by precept and example. My joy over the success that I believe this technology can bring to students is starting to rub off on others. I think that I can say that I am inspiring others to become more optimistic about these students with special learning needs, just like the Schools Attuned (2005) programme espouses.

Another piece of data that interested me from the teacher survey was that less frustration was noted during the assessment. Several years ago, before we were able to offer the use of assistive technology to special needs’ students, I remember dreading the EQAO assessment time. I spent several days dealing with students who were frustrated and crying. I spent most of my time dealing with anger and poor behaviour because students would spend 15 minutes trying to complete the assessment, then they would give up and I would spend the next hour trying to keep them quiet. With the use of assistive technology, there were no behaviour incidents noted by teachers or myself. The fact that one teacher noted that her students were “even motivated” to complete the assessment is really encouraging. Could increased motivation be yet another

benefit of using the technology? I think that my future work with students and teachers needs to include a focus on motivation. I will need to gather more data pertaining to motivation as it is perceived by the students and their teachers.

Other aspects of the teacher questionnaire, however, are cause for reflection. When I saw that really only one teacher had ventured out and begun to explore the technology independently, I was somewhat disenchanted. Was I really building capacity? Were these teachers really learning to fish on their own in the assistive technology waters? Had I not instilled in them the confidence to at least explore and experiment with the technology? In their book, *Leading Schools in a Data-Rich World*, (2006), Earl and Katz quote Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) as saying, "...teachers constantly revisit and renew their purposes; always looking for evidence and feedback about how well they are doing, and honestly examining whether they need to do things differently or better" (p. 47). Although it was difficult for me to look at the data and see that the teachers didn't feel that they yet possessed the skills with the technology to make practical applications to regular classroom reading activities, I appreciated their honesty and their suggestions for what they needed to make the transition from this specific EQAO experience to the everyday, real life work of the classroom. The questionnaire data caused me to reflect on my principle about 'teaching a person to fish'. I began to think that perhaps I expect too much too soon from the teachers I am collaborating with. As the teacher from School B said "Time is needed to become familiar and self-confident with use of assistive technology." The teachers from School A and C both seemed to suggest that they needed more hands-on experience in incorporating the technology into the classroom. As I reflected even more on the comments from the teacher questionnaire I found myself comparing how I would teach a student and how I would teach an adult. I realized that I needed to appreciate that adults have all kinds of different learning styles just like children do. I realized that at the same time that I was asking teachers to differentiate their instruction and teaching practice for students, I need to make sure that I am differentiating my instruction and support for those teachers.

This educational inquiry into the use of Premier Assistive Technology and EQAO Assessment has provided for me an enlightened view of the nature of my influence upon others and the values that form the foundation of that influence. I realize that to improve my work as an advocate for special needs' students and as a "coach" to the teachers who teach these students with special learning challenges, I need to take more time to understand the learning needs of the teacher. I need to take the time to ask questions about what kinds of support would best help them help the special needs' students in their classroom. I need to spend more time developing practical lessons involving the use of technology; modeling how these lessons would look in a classroom and then supporting the teacher until he/she is independent and self-confident.

Time to Strengthen My Link in the Chain Yet Again

Earl and Katz state that “for informed professionalism, leaders will need to develop an inquiry habit of mind, become data literate, and create a culture of inquiry in their school community” (page 17). They explain an inquiry habit of mind as “collecting and interpreting evidence in ways that advance their understanding” (page 18). To that end I would like to continue my work with the students and teachers from this inquiry next academic year (2008-2009). It would be interesting to look at the results of the EQAO assessment in the Fall of 2008 to see if the use of assistive technology allowed these students to achieve at higher levels than might have been expected without the technology. I would like to continue working with the students and their teachers to develop lessons using the technology to support their reading goals. It is my hope that together, the teachers and I could create a culture of inquiry around the use of Premier assistive technology and reading improvement.

In order to be prepared to support teachers in this way I am in the process of developing a one day Summer Institute course to investigate practical classroom applications using Premier Technology. My colleague, Janet McCutchen, and I will be creating some simple lesson plans using Internet accessible texts at varying grade levels as well as an e-text library source. We hope to develop the best-practice process for assisting teachers to integrate Premier assistive technology into their daily practice and into the daily routine of students with challenges in reading. We are hoping to develop the most practical and user friendly methods that teachers will find easy to manage.

To further build a culture of inquiry around the use of Premier assistive technology in the classroom I have joined the Premier Café. This is an initiative begun by our Board’s System Resource Teacher for Assistive Technology, Germaine Glaves. The idea behind the Café is to gather together educators who are experimenting with Premier. The Café will support the sharing of ideas, strategies and lessons using Premier as well as provide support for problem solving of technical problems.

I believe that the Premier Café group could become a community of data collectors around the benefits and barriers of the Premier technology for our Board and I think we could become real agents of change and advocates for the use of Premier assistive technology as a means to differentiate instruction, provide fair accommodations and infuse optimism for students with unique learning challenges.

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Appendix A

Permission for Participation in an Education Inquiry

I, Theresa McDougald, am currently involved in a Master's level course called Data Based Decision Making with Brock University. This course involves completing an educational inquiry into my professional practice.

My educational inquiry involves an investigation of the use of Premier assistive technology for use during the EQAO assessment of 2008.

Over the past 4-6 weeks you and I have engaged in dialogue and practical investigation of the Premier assistive technology and past and present EQAO assessments.

I am seeking your permission to use my observations and journal entries of our work together in my final paper for the completion of this course. I am also seeking your participation in completing a questionnaire and your permission to use the questionnaire feedback in my final paper.

Your identity and the identity of your school will be anonymous.

If you agree to the use of your questionnaire feedback and our dialogue from our work together to be used in my paper, please sign and date below.

I thank you for your professional input into my educational inquiry.

Yours in Education,

Theresa McDougald

Educator signature

Date

Appendix B

Educational Inquiry Questionnaire

Premier Assistive Technology and EQAO Assessment

1. Before our work together, how familiar were you with the Premier Assistive Technology? (please specify which Premier Tools you had used, which training you might have received)
2. Prior to our work together, have you ever been involved with students who used assistive technology to complete EQAO assessments? If yes, please describe which technology was used.
3. Since our work together how often have you used Premier Assistive Technology? In what capacity? (practicing yourself, training students, showing other colleagues, etc).
4. Please list any difficulties or barriers that you encountered or your students encountered while using Premier Assistive Technology at your school.
5. In what ways was my support helpful or not helpful in preparing you and your students for the EQAO assessment? (please be specific)
6. Do you feel that your students performed better on the EQAO assessment using Premier Assistive Technology? What particular observations did you make to cause you to think this?
7. How do you feel about the use of Premier Assistive Technology as an everyday tool to support literacy in the classroom? Benefits? Barriers?
8. What further support, knowledge or skills would you need to integrate Premier Assistive Technology into your daily practice?

How Can I Improve the Literacy Levels among the Boys in my Classroom?

Barkev Poladian

Biography

I am in my fifteenth year of teaching, twelve for Grand Erie District School Board. I currently teach Grade 6 at North Ward Public School in Paris, Ontario. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Child Studies from Brock University and am currently enrolled in the Masters of Education Program with Brock University. I also have my specialist in Computers in the Classroom and Special Education. This is my second action research project, conducted and submitted to satisfy the course requirements for my studies in the Master of Education program.

Abstract

In April of 2008, I struggled to come to consensus about the direction I wanted to travel in regards to my second action research project (Poladian, 2008a). In many ways, this second foray into the investigation of my own practice generated less trepidation and far more excitement, as I felt much more comfortable about the actual process from the onset. Moreover, the possibilities of marrying this research into a possible exit project for my degree provided additional motivation to be encouraged about. After much deliberation, I settled on investing my time in an area that I felt would best meet the needs of my students - improving student literacy. Having previously investigated and reported on differentiating instruction in the classroom (Poladian, 2007), I wanted to build on the research I collected into the pages of my current project. By developing the skills of data literacy for the purposes of establishing and encouraging a culture of inquiry (Earl & Katz, 2006) within my own practice and with my peers, I hoped to establish a framework for differentiating my teaching strategies in order to help my students improve their literacy levels in my classroom. It's worthy to note that as I became more aware of the data and the alarming comparisons between the literacy levels of the boys and the girls in my school and in my own board, my focus became more direct as I shifted toward investigating boys' literacy and how overall literacy levels might improve through careful and deliberate differentiation of instruction around the boys in my classroom.

Context: Outline

This project was a culmination of three phases of inquiry. In the preliminary phase, I provided a focus of inquiry and conducted an investigation as to the specific types of data available to me in order to begin the process of formulating an educational inquiry. Subsequently, I was able to refine the research question as I established a basis for an educational inquiry that was relevant to me, and to my own practice. Furthermore, I established a framework of relevancy as I learned to collect and discern the data and to extrapolate the necessary information and implications to justify the form in which any succeeding action would take. In conjunction with relevant research literature available to me, and with the assistance of my peers, I was able to move forward with determination.

In the beginning:

This project excited me for a number of reasons. It provided me with an opportunity to make important connections between the content introduced within the parameters of graduate studies course work to my own role as a teacher. It further allowed me an opportunity to develop the skills of an instructional leader within my school community, while engaging in action research to improve my practice and help my school in achieving the mandates outlined in the *School Improvement Plan*. (North Ward School, 2007).

I began my quest with an informal visit to my school principal. I explained to her the requirements of this assignment and asked for an opinion of where I should consider focusing my inquiry, based on our school needs. It was no surprise to me that she would suggest I concentrate on literacy, as it is the primary focus of the *School Improvement Plan* (North Ward School, 2007) and the formulation of the accompanying *smart goals* for the current school year. Her suggestion to me was that I look at Provincial Standardized Assessments, more specifically the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) results from last year for the purpose of raising the test scores for this year and in future years. The *smart goal* established was that 75% of students will be achieving Level Three and Four in reading and writing on the 2008 E.Q.A.O. test. As I pondered how I would move forward within these parameters, I considered the words of Earl and Katz (2006) who state that: “a school leader with an inquiry habit of mind values deep understanding and takes a range of perspectives and systematically poses increasingly focused questions” (p. 18). As I considered the literacy levels of the students in my own classroom, given two sets of report cards and CASI (Comprehension Attitude Strategies Interests) results from the first month of school, I subsequently refocused my attention on comparing the levels of achievement between the boys and the girls in my classroom. Without focusing too heavily on the dissection of the data itself, it became readily apparent to me that the majority of the boys in my classroom were achieving levels far below their female counterparts in language. The structure of my inquiry was becoming more visibly clear. My research question would become, “How do I improve the levels of literacy among the boys in my classroom? By focusing on this question, I would hope that my research would help me in assisting my students in moving closer to meeting the requirements of the School Improvement Plan. At long last, I felt confident in the notion that I now had a direction to move forward.

Earl and Katz (2006) state that:

Educational leaders and school staffs who are committed to professional accountability and making informed professional judgments think of accountability not as a static accounting but as a conversation, using data to stimulate discussion, stimulate ideas, rethink directions, and monitor progress, providing an ongoing image of their school as it changes, progresses, stalls, regroups, and moves forward again. (p. 13).

I took the concept of conversation into the school Professional Learning Community (PLC) and divisional meetings that included the attendance of our designated School Literacy Coach. As an O.F.I.P. (Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership) school in Year Three of the Ontario Ministry of Education initiative, the Literacy Coach’s role in our school community is to assist teachers in

developing high yield strategies to improve the literacy scores of our students and meet the targets of the *School Improvement Plan* (North Ward School, 2007). Many of the ideas discussed in the PLC's I participated in this year focused on overall improvement of scores in the junior division. The literacy coach was an invaluable resource in assisting my school with the infusion of ideas, and suggestions that were based on our specific school needs as outlined in the School Improvement Plan. I immediately contacted the literacy coach for my school and was very glad to garner her interest and support with regards to my current educational inquiry.

Earl and Katz (2006) lay the groundwork for establishing an effective culture of inquiry that include reminding educators to involve others in interpreting and engaging data and by employing the use of critical friends. (p. 21). In conjunction, I managed to engage the support of my school librarian who shared my ideas of focusing on boys' literacy and also wanted to participate in her own capacity through the purchasing of appropriate books and resources to support the activities of the classroom. I also gained the support of the school Learning Resource Teacher to be available to assist me in the implementation of instructional strategies I choose to employ with my identified students who will also be writing the EQAO test. As Routman (2002) suggests:

When teachers are well informed – by learning theory and relevant research, as well as by careful reflection on their own experiences – they can make confident decisions about teaching practices. And one of the most powerful approaches to developing this kind of confidence is ongoing professional conversation among colleagues, built into a school's professional development expectations of staff. (p. 32)

Whereas I initially believed this task may become too daunting to develop, implement and report on within the four week period prior to the conclusion of this course, I started to envision a better sense of clarity and emerging confidence in the task at hand. With a clear support network in place, I was ready to take on the challenge of using the available data to develop an inquiry habit of mind, become data literate and ultimately facilitate a culture of inquiry (Earl & Katz, 2006) to further improve my practice and help the boys in my Grade 6 classroom emerge as more confident learners with improved literacy scores.

As I began to formulate this inquiry, I reflected on what data was initially available to me. I referred earlier to The School Improvement Plan which was developed in conjunction with an assessment of student achievement in E.Q.A.O. As this data is readily available on the Internet (www.eqao.com), I retrieved the information to utilize in the development of my inquiry. Moreover, I discovered the data to be presented in multiple ways including gender comparisons. Despite the fact that I had previously familiarized myself with the E.Q.A.O. data for my class in terms of overall achievement in language and mathematics, I was curious to see how pronounced the gender variations would be. I was truly taken aback by the differentials. For example, forty-six percent of the twenty-eight boys in Grade 6 to write the E.Q.A.O. test in the 2006-2007 school year scored Level Three in Reading, compared to 86% of the twenty-two girls who scored Level three or higher. No boys scored a Level Four in Reading. The distinctions were just as

pronounced in writing, as 39% of all boys scored a Level Three and 77% of all girls scored a Level Three. (Education Quality Accountability Office, 2008). Further to the E.Q.A.O. data available, alternate assessments conducted in the fall such as CASI and Term 1 and 2 reporting can also be retrieved to help make the distinctions to support the inequality of results by gender. Given the extensive amount of data readily available, I believe to have a solid groundwork of information to build on as I assess the general and specific areas of weakness for the boys in my classroom.

By focusing my action research investigation more broadly on the creation of a culture of inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, I hope to engage the stakeholders (myself, the students, parents, teachers, coaches, and administrators) at my school, to approach their responsibilities in this partnership more holistically and in a manner that is intended to become an integral and continuous part of our professional life and school culture.

As I anticipated the weeks ahead, I clarified my journey through various journal writings, discussions with my course advisor and with my critical friends. I became more familiar with the increasing volume of evidence that gender played a significant role in literacy achievement and familiarized myself with specific strategies that I would employ such as a series of “literacy workshops” targeted at improving boys’ assessment of themselves as learners. It was my profound hope that this would result in an overall improvement in achievement within specific areas of the literacy program identified as deficient within the available data. Earl and Katz (2006) state: “Having data is a beginning, but it is not enough. Schools need to move from being data-rich to being information-rich and knowledge-rich as well.” (p. 14). To obtain knowledge, questions must be asked for analysis, insight and learning to be achieved. In developing a culture of inquiry, I had to ask myself what I might do with my newfound knowledge? Furthermore, I had to consider, how would I engage the stakeholders of my inquiry as I develop my project? Alternatively, I also inquired of myself, how I would share what I learned with my school community?” This piece of work is one way that I can impress upon my colleagues the ways in which data can be used to develop an action plan that is relevant and justifiable. I am reminded by the words of Palmer (2008) who stated that:

The growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it. We grow by private trial and error, to be sure – but our willingness to try, and fail, as individuals is severely limited when we are not supported by a community that encourages such risks.(p. 144).

The Process Takes Shape

As I began my transformation into becoming data literate, I conferenced with several colleagues who had offered their support from the onset of my inquiry. My literacy coach without a doubt was paramount in fueling my enthusiasm, and directing me toward collecting the necessary data to begin my inquiry. As a critical friend, she was invaluable to helping me with “the technical aspects of locating, organizing, and analyzing the data to facilitate the work” (Earl & Katz, 2006,

p. 54) Still, I felt a bit overwhelmed with my apparent task, and wanted to learn a bit more about what it was I was about to uncover, so I continued to engage in familiarizing myself with some of the recent literature about data. Bernhardt (2003, p. 26-30) states that there is more than one kind of data that can be analyzed to help one to better learn about school effectiveness. They include *demographic data* which include descriptions of the students, the community in which they live, and the school. I decided I would ask my administrator to help me collect this information, as I was certain she would have access to it, or at least be able to direct me to where it could be obtained. Second, there is *student learning data* which includes standardized norm-referenced assessments such as The Woodcock Johnson Test of cognitive abilities, and the Peabody (PPVT) measure of receptive listening vocabulary test. Student learning data also includes criterion-referenced assessment, whereby student performance is measured against an established criteria such as CASI (Comprehension Attitude Strategies Interests) and EQAO,(Education Quality Assessment Organization) as well as teacher designed assessments which include classroom tests and assignments, anecdotal, rubrics, and conferencing. The data that I have collected thus far, predominantly encompass the latter two types. For example, I have collected data from term report cards (formulated from teacher designed assessments) , CASI, and EQAO results from previous years. Third, there is *perceptions data*, where the voice of the various stakeholders are addressed. These are gathered through interviews, questionnaires and observations. I felt confident that I would be able to access this through pre-existing questionnaires that I would administer to the most important stakeholders in this study - my students, and through informal discussions and interviews with my students, my colleagues, administrators, and the parents. Moreover, I felt that the colleagues I had designated as my critical friends would become invaluable to me during this process as I discuss what I have learned and the interpretations of what that might mean with regards to delivery and programming in my classroom.

Data Collection: Phase One

Demographics

North Ward Elementary School in Paris, Ontario, is a rural kindergarten to Grade 8 elementary school under the jurisdiction of the Grand Erie District School Board. Current enrolment reports (*Appendix A*) rank North Ward School as the second largest elementary school in the entire board, with a registration of 486 students. According to the collection of recent demographic data commissioned by the board (Moffatt, 2006, *Appendix B*), I was able to view a comparative analysis between North Ward and the provincial mean for each category. I was fascinated to see that in certain demographic categories, such as annual family income, my school compared consistently with the provincial average. There was a much lower percentage of foreign born families in our school community, as compared to the province, and English was almost exclusively the home language. The data also surprised me in other ways, since I did not expect to discover that almost half of the community did not have a high school diploma, slightly higher than the provincial average. Moreover, just under one-fifth of the community had some university, also a statistic lower than the provincial average. Although I did not arrive at this school with pre-determined notions of school community demographics, I must say that I was

surprised that our school did not rank higher in many of these demographic markers. Having said that, I discovered that preconceived notions are not always correct notions. The demographic data provided a snapshot that offers me some background knowledge on the culture of not only the school community, but of my own classroom and the students that I teach. It also provides me an opportunity to better interpret achievement results with added understanding in order to adjust resources and strategies for improving my practice.

My Classroom: A Snapshot

There are two grade 6 classes at North Ward School, split fairly evenly with a total of fifty-six students. There are also two boys in Grade 6 whose home room is in the Mixed- Exceptionalities class, who will also be participating in provincial testing this current school year. These students, albeit on Individual Education Plans (I.E.P) are still required to write the E.Q.A.O. test with specific accommodations as identified in their I.E.P's. My classroom of 26 students, consists of 12 boys and 13 girls. The boys in my class have progressed through North Ward School over the majority of their elementary lives, all or most enrolled by the time they were in Grade 1. The boys are all twelve years of age at the time of this study, except for one who is thirteen, having repeated Grade 1. Five of these students come from families of divorce. Two of the boys in my classroom work under an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P). One of the boys is of mixed exceptionalities and works with a full time Educational Assistant. The other boy has been diagnosed with a Mild Intellectual Disability (M.I.D). His program has been modified whereby he is being programmed for and is currently achieving below provincial expectations for his grade level. Moreover, I was able to develop a table from attendance data obtained by my school secretary for the current school year. (*Appendix C*). I noticed no anomalies in attendance or lates among these boys over the course of the past nine months.

Student Learning Data

From the onset, I knew there would be limitations to my study. For anyone conducting action research, it is extremely important to recognize the limitations of their study. I assessed this from the onset. Primarily, by isolating the boys, the sample size of my population would be very small. I was still somewhat unsure as to the validity and reliability of the data I would collect on such a small sample. That is where my critical friend, my trusted Literacy Coach came in to help me refocus. She informed me that “any data I compiled from my classroom would be appropriate and reliable data.”(J. Woodley, personal communication, May 8, 2008). As Earl and Katz (2006, p. 57) state, “when you are using data, you are making inferences about what you know and might do from the evidence that is available to you.” The evidence directly impacts the sample population, no matter how big or how small. I came to realize that there were two significant purposes for this inquiry. First, I was in a unique position to create theory about my life as a professional educator. Secondly, I was able to work directly in the moment, and to focus on a specific group of students that the research implied were at risk in order to help *them* to improve. Moreover, as “validity refers to the accuracy of the interpretation and the use of the data” (J. DeLong, personal communication, June 14, 2008), the same notion holds true. The data collected does indeed help me to measure what I am trying to understand. Furthermore,

inferences that were drawn developed my programming strategy, and its overall effectiveness in improving student learning.

In hindsight, I was concerned about the minimal length of time designated by the parameters of this particular inquiry. I discussed these feelings with my instructor, who challenged me to develop manageable criteria and time lines that would center on improving one particular area of boys' literacy whereby any achievement or gain would potentially springboard into 2008-2009 and modifications to current instructional strategies. (J. Delong, personal communication, May 22, 2008).

Armed with a focus, a developing philosophy, and an abundance of enthusiasm, I set out to collect the data to organize. Through the support of my administrator, I was able to access specific EQAO. data for my school. I spent an afternoon downloading the necessary files of the EQAO. results over the course of the last five years. From this data, I was also able to access data regarding the percentage of all Grade Six students at or above provincial standards by gender. *Appendix D* shows that there is a definite distinction in the level of achievement between boys and girls, not only in reading but also in writing. Moreover, this disparity is evident in some of the previous years of retrievable data. *Appendix E* illustrates a four-year trend of gender disparity between males and females, as well as achievement in reading by boys that would be considered static, hovering around the fifty to fifty-five percent range. Notwithstanding the change in the sample population for each year, there is a similar phenomenon occurring - that boys are not nearly achieving the same results as their female counterparts in literacy. Based on this data, I believe there is significant merit in forging ahead into the research on boys literacy to develop programs that specifically isolate the boys' weaknesses. The assumption being made is that the current trend in female achievement levels would not drop, and therefore the overall levels of literacy would improve in my classroom, thus aiding in establishing and maintaining the criteria of 75% at Level Three and Level Four, set forth in the School Improvement Plan.

In order to make comparisons with the provincial data, my school also implements alternate assessment data in the junior division. I was able to obtain CASI and report card results from the Student Data Warehouse for the current school year and created a chart to compare the two results (*Appendix F*). Four out of twelve boys in my class were reported to be at Level Three based on report card data. Alternatively, two out of twelve scored a Level Three or higher in their CASI results. I found this to be somewhat surprising, as I expected those results to be comparable to each other or perhaps even a bit higher. I discussed this with my Literacy Coach, as I wondered if perhaps my assessment strategies were not consistent. Her response to me was that this was probably not the case as one piece of assessment data is not a true reflection of a students' abilities, and that it requires various types of assessment data to formulate a true picture of a students' overall literacy levels (J. Woodley, personal communication, May 8, 2008). Moreover, there was also the assumption that literacy levels in October could show improvement as high yield strategies are implemented. Thus, an entire month and a half of teaching and evaluation had taken place following the initial CASI implementation and before the first term reporting period. Thus, it would be entirely plausible to see differences when

comparing CASI results and report card grades. In regards to CASI, I was further able to obtain data from the Grand Erie District School Board Student Data Warehouse to identify the specific areas where the boys scored significantly lower than girls. *Appendix G* outlines that Questions 4 and 8 on the CASI test were consistently done poorly by the vast majority of the boys in my class. These questions refer to the specific categories of Knowledge and Understanding, and Thinking. In developing an action plan for the boys, this data will be invaluable as I formulate a specific plan to target their major areas of weakness.

In summary, a first hand analysis of the current student learning data paints an indisputable picture, and that is that boys are generally struggling in literacy, especially in reading.

Perceptions Data

Perhaps for me, the most compelling data I was able to gather was from the voice of my students themselves, through questionnaires and surveys administered to them. The answers to specific questions regarding one's feelings about reading were very telling. It illustrated significant disinterest for reading was at the forefront, and with additional questioning, a deeper perspective of my students were reached. I was able to use survey data from CASI and decided to compare it to the EQAO survey (males only) from the previous year. I grouped the questions by similarity in focus and scope (*Appendix H*). By doing so, I noticed many disturbing similarities about the current year's and previous year's group of Grade Six boys perceptions of reading. With the goals of the School Effectiveness Framework of 75% Level Three Achievement in the back of my mind, I truly began to see how student perception about reading directly related to their overall achievement. Three particular answers to the survey questions were particularly telling. Eight percent of the boys in my class liked to talk about information or ideas after they had read something; thirty-three percent considered themselves a good reader; seventeen percent actually enjoyed going to the library; and twenty-five percent indicated that their family reads at home. These perceptions most likely have increased the gender gap over the years, and will continue to put boys in a higher risk bracket for academic underachievement. Some of the comments my students have made on their survey sheets were also unsettling:

"I don't like to read because I find reading really boring and I don't enjoy it."

"I don't really like reading because it's boring to just sit there and read a book."

"Reading is only fun if you are interested in the book you are reading."

"To be truthful, I don't like to read. I think it's boring."

Others who commented favourably, stated:

I really enjoy reading books that are in a series, because when you finish each book, you get a sense of accomplishment.

I enjoy adventure books mostly, but sometimes I can be persuaded to read other types of books if someone who has already read it tells me it's really good. (Poladian, 2008a)

Overall, I found the perceptions data particularly useful in uncovering the often times deep rooted philosophies about reading that may directly relate to poor student achievement. Developing strategies to improve boys' literacy would have to directly address many of these perceptions.

The data collected guided me through the following weeks as I considered and implemented my research. Moreover, I would spend significant time collaborating with my critical friends, as I analyzed the specific areas of reading that I would target. These weeks were indeed exhausting for my students as they would also be participating in this year's EQAO testing. I will be highly anticipating the results of this current year's EQAO results in order to compare them to the data I have since collected. I hypothesize that the current trends will remain, as I become much more diligent and focused on further differentiating my program in order to meet the specific needs of the boys. As the action plan developed, I considered the voices of my students to develop a program that will be interesting and motivational for them. *Appendix I*, a reading interest inventory is one piece of data that will help to inform my programming. Alternatively, the current research on boys literacy will also guide me in developing an action plan that I can build on in the coming years. Gurian addresses brain based research as: "crying out for teachers to make group processes a basic component of learning. The more projects that groups of two, three or four students can accomplish together, the more varied the learning experience." (2001 p. 132). Wilhelm and Smith concur:

The importance of the social aspect of learning to boys show how group structures such as literary letter exchanges, book clubs, literature circles, cooperative learning groups, reading buddies, reciprocal reading groups, and others can provide motivation and assistance to students. (2002, p. 199)

This inquiry has challenged me to use a range of school and classroom data as a basis for making decisions to improve student learning. Many issues have already been discussed and strategies were considered for locating, gathering, and interpreting data that support not only myself, but my colleagues to improving the literacy skills of all students, in particular boys' literacy. Following a general overview of the rich data sources of the school and community level, I took the opportunity to listen to the voices of students that emerged from meaningful interactions in the classroom. At this stage of the process, I was ready, as Earl and Katz (2006, p. 93) state: to move into action.

Findings

From the onset, I have struggled to find the answers to why students were not able to clearly demonstrate complete understanding of what they read. As I read some of the previous action research projects available from the Grand Erie Board, one colleague clearly articulated for me exactly how I have felt about my students' ability to respond to reading comprehension questions:

Whether it's writing a narrative, responding to reading comprehension questions, or answering questions in core subjects such as social studies and science, it has been an ongoing struggle to get the students to write with more description and information, or to clearly express their message (Clark, 2004, p.99).

I have spoken these words to colleagues, wondered aloud, and even used trial and error when thinking about new ideas, but what I have recently learned as a result of this exercise is that data can be a determining factor on how to narrow down my focus and deal with the issues systematically. Over the course of the next several days, I formulated an outline for a plan that would further differentiate how I organize and present my literacy blocks in my classroom. This time, based on the information derived from the student learning and perceptions data, I would pay closer attention to the unique learning styles of the boys in the classroom. Utilizing many of the ideas presented in a variety of reading publications, among them, the Ontario Ministry publication, *Me Read, No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy Skills* (2004), ideas from the literacy coach, school librarian, my teaching partner, and Learning Resource Teacher I set out to develop a plan. At first I seemed a bit overwhelmed with the influx of ideas by others: "You should be doing this; don't forget to consider this; hopefully you are remembering to do this; etc.". I was feeling somewhat, 'brain-drained' even before setting out. One very solid piece of advice that was offered to me by my school librarian brought me back into focus and restored my confidence: "Barkev, you do realize that as I watch you every day with your students, you are doing all the right things to provide them with the best opportunities for success. Trust your instincts. You are always exercising good teaching practice." (P. Gladding, personal communications, May 22, 2008). My teaching partner also chimed in with her vote of confidence: "Whatever I can do to help, all you have to do is ask. I am more than happy to support you any way I can." (M. Burns, personal communication, May 23, 2008). As I had some time to reflect on these statements, I acknowledged that not only were my peers showing support and encouragement toward my research, they were also offering to be a part of it as co-researchers, and that made my task far less daunting. I actually had a team whose participation I truly valued! Newfound confidence in tow, my plan started to take shape.

From the onset, I have used the information from student questionnaires to provide me with some perspective on student motivation for learning. Using the EQAO questionnaires as a starting point, I assessed that motivation was a prime factor in boys' lack of interest in reading. This also became evident after I conducted whole group video conferencing for both Grade 6 classes with my teaching partner the week prior to our Grade 6 testing dates. (*Appendix J: CD ROM*).¹ The frank discussions and opportunity for students to speak their mind was particularly sobering. I had no idea that boy's for the most part, felt so disinterested about reading. Moreover, I was equally surprised to hear that the majority of the boys were embarrassed by their scores when compared to the girls. Nevertheless, this exercise was significant and necessary as it not only fueled my investigation forward, it established an entry point whereby my students actually became aware of my research and willing participants. Comparatively, as the published

¹ Available upon request.

literature illustrates, boys' need to buy into what is being presented to them. Often times, they need to be hooked in. Using the ideas supported by the Assessment Reform Group (2002), I set out to establish a plan that would help students to become more motivated in their tasks at school. *Appendix K* illustrates the foundations I considered for developing my plan. Obviously, performing well on a test was not a motivating factor. The Assessment Reform Group (ARG) research affirms this, and the voices of my students raised alarming parallels. I had to consider how I would develop the boys' sense of self as a learner, goal orientation, self-esteem, interest, etc. After several days of reflecting on my own teaching pedagogy, reading the pertinent literature on boys literacy available to me, and collaborating with my peer coach, teaching partner, and librarian on ways I could enhance boys' interest, I developed a plan.

Action Plan

Using the CASI data I had collected, I determined that Question #4 was overall completed poorly by most of the boys in my class. This question dealt with summarization of text. It was of no surprise to me that this would be the case even without the corroborating data, as I have been endlessly dismayed regarding the difficulties of motivating my students to appropriately summarize chapters from text, poems, short articles, peer narrative, etc. Often times, a summary response for several pages of text would amount to less than three sentences, with much of the supplemental supporting information missing or misunderstood. Thus, in an effort to maintain control over the short term of this research, summarization of text was the focus of the reading program I would target with this particular class, and this particular group of boys.

I spent the upcoming Saturday in my classroom, re-arranging my classroom environment to help arrange the setting in order to create an environment that would assist boys in becoming more motivated at reading. First, I was able to obtain an old electric fireplace that was donated by a staff member to the school library. The librarian decided that she didn't want it because it was too large for the space she wanted to use it for. She offered it to me, as I had plenty of room at the back of my classroom. I thought to myself, why not set up a reading area for my students? I had a colourful floor rug, was able to obtain some bean bag chairs from my teaching partner when needed, and now I had a fireplace that, albeit did not give off heat, did flash a light that simulated a fire. The environment would be much more motivating for any of my students to want to read. So this became the start of my classroom face-lift. Second, I decided to take all the books in my classroom and reorganize them in terms of genre. Based on my students' reading response inventory, boys were specifically interested in certain kinds of books, such as graphic novels, horror, comedy, sports, etc. I wanted to make the books visible and more available to my students. This was an idea I borrowed from another colleague whose Action Research concluded that organizing her books by genre worked out best for her class. (Pardoe, 2003). In her research, Pardoe (2003, p.105) organized her classroom according to what she believed would provide the best learning environment for her class before she embarked on a set of mini lessons to help her students develop their competencies in literacy. I saw myself sharing a similar philosophy.

When my students came into the classroom on Monday morning, they were completely shocked to see a fireplace in the class, a carpet and special comfy chairs for reading. Suddenly, there was a spark of interest from some of my boys. Austin asked, “*what’s all that for?*”; Brock exclaimed, “*Sweet! There’s a fireplace in the classroom! Does it work?*”; Shelby chimed in, “*Does that have to do with your project on us that you are doing?*” (Poladian, 2008a). Clearly, I had sparked the students’ interest. After all of the students settled down, I explained the plan for the week. Overall, I explained to them my goal as a teacher was to see that everyone improved in their literacy skills. But, I shared with them a side-bar hope. I confided to them, that my other number one goal was to find a way for students to learn, and have fun, and enjoy what they do at the same time”. The research published by the Ontario Ministry explained my rationale:

To close the literacy gender gap, teachers must make reading and writing an intentional, persistent, and emphatic focus in the classroom – in all subjects. Cultivating the reading and writing habit – by providing enjoyable reading and writing opportunities across the curriculum, ensuring that reading and writing assignments engage boys as well as girls, and offering boys consistent opportunities to achieve success – can pay substantial dividends (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 12).

Based on the positive responses and excited chatter, I think I found my hook.

I explained at the onset, that the designated area at the back was an area for independent reading, and that I would rotate students daily so that a group of 5 could read there during independent reading blocks. I would encourage students select a book from the bins and use the materials for their reading block. What I planned to do differently this time was to get my students to talk about what they read and to encourage discussion amongst each other about what they had read. In this way, I was hoping to improve their overall ability to summarize text. I set out five basic questions to consider in discussion:

1. Who is the character(s) you have come into contact with?
2. What is it that the character(s) does, and what motivates him or her to want to do this?
3. What things get in the way of the character(s) from achieving his or her goal?
4. How does the character(s) overcome the obstacles?
5. How does the story end?

I chose this approach as the research suggests that best practice for boys is to: “clearly define assessment tasks so that students, particularly those who are underachieving, understand the steps they must take to complete the work” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p.16). Also, it was important for me to promote social interaction among peers following a reading activity because as the research states:

boys need to talk through their ideas before they are sure they understand what they have read and before they can commit their ideas to paper effectively. Failing to provide for this social component, for the opportunity to verbalize ideas before reading or writing about them, can create a problem for some boys. This problem may be invisible to both the student and the teacher, but it can significantly hamper a boy's ability to become a successful, fully engaged reader and writer. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 27)

Over the course of that week, I allowed students to become more familiar with the reading materials available to them. The school librarian, having previously taken a vested interest in boys' literacy spent over two thousand dollars on reading materials, and selected several genres and titles with books in mind. Graphic novels, action books in series, such as the Harry Potter series, and Eregon, sports books, books on cars and machines, media books, horror, comedy, etc. were now available to the students. The librarian had taken the time to introduce many of these titles to my class specifically. The interest was certainly developing based on the amount of sign-outs of the new materials that week. All of my students had the opportunity to read in the *special area*, which they all looked forward to. I allowed them to sprawl out much like if they were at home, on the sofa or on the living room floor. After the 20 minutes of uninterrupted reading, I had students partner up and discuss what they read, and use the questions as guides to help facilitate the discussion. At first, it was difficult for many of them to feel confident to think about what they wanted to say and articulate it. I had to do a few mini lessons where I read a short story and modeled the process, but for some, I had to help guide their discussion and prompt them to participate. Once they were trained to focus on the pre-set questions, I could hear meaningful conversation suddenly taking place. As I circulated through the classroom, I was excited to hear students asking their peers specific questions about what they were hearing.

Shelby stopped Tanner at one point of the conversation: "*Wait wait wait, slow down. I don't understand why he wanted to run away from home if his mother bought him a trip to Disneyland for his birthday! I wouldn't be running away if my mom did that. That's stupid!*" (Poladian, 2008a). As I listened to the various conversations without interrupting, I started to see that as students began to take ownership of their tasks, they were building their own self-esteem through the boldness of their inquiry of others' thoughts and ideas. They were also showing more effort in the activity because of the direct interaction with their peers and not specifically with their teacher. They seemed more interested about the discussions and for some of my students who rarely demonstrate much effort. I was seeing more enthusiasm in their remarks. In so doing, they were developing a stronger sense of themselves as learners through their building confidence. I was impressed as to how the ARG study (2002) study was coming to life before my very eyes. Yet at this stage, my students had yet to put thought to paper. That was the next phase of my intervention strategy.

As I commented earlier, the goal of my study would be to assist my boys in improving their overall literacy scores. Thus, I needed to have some data to justify that indeed, I had been successful in helping to bridge that gap between the boys and the girls in my classroom. I had to employ interesting and motivating strategies in my mini lessons to foster better results in testing. In the end, my students were about to participate in

provincial testing during the upcoming week, so making them redo the CASI test would have seemed particularly cruel from both the perspectives of my students and myself. Thus, I engaged in a little “fibbery”. I set the stage by telling them how impressed I was with how well everyone had been doing in the reading and discussions phase of the activity. Then, I told them, the next logical step would be to test them, but that I wasn’t going to do that. My students were impressed. Telling a student that they were not going to be formally tested given that provincial testing was just around the corner was music to their ears. I did however say, that in lieu of testing, they had to perform a “social activity”. Again, the ears sparked, the eyes narrowed, and the focus was on my next words. Little did they know, I was in effect testing them on how they would be able to take their discussions to the next step.

Ontario Ministry of Education research (2004) identifies a key learning strategy for boys is through the use of graphic organizers: “Graphic organizers and other visual tools can be a useful means of demonstrating the relationships between things, both spatially and conceptually. They can be used in literacy activities in ways that may help *let boys in on the secret.*” (p.20). Moreover the research continues to suggest that teachers should: “use graphic organizers and other visual tools (e.g., concept wheels, sequence-of-events chains, sound wheels, story boards, word webs) to help students organize their thoughts before starting a writing activity.” This would be particularly effective with many of the students (several boys that I can think of off the top of my head) that always say: “*I don’t know where to start!! I don’t know what to write!*”

In the mini lessons I conducted, I provided my students with a graphic organizer concept that was introduced to me by my literacy coach. In the activity, she took a piece of chart paper and drew a five- column table. The columns were labeled from left to right: Somebody; Wants; But; So; Finally. This was the structure I would introduce to my students to help them summarize a piece of text. The next step was demonstrating it. I did it twice with two books: *Mr. Peobody’s Apples, by Madonna* (given her recent hit single on the North American pop music charts, my boys were especially interested in the story because of the author); and, *The Ant Bully, by John Nickle*. Both short stories are engaging and deal with morals and values that are important in class discussion. After reading the book, I asked the class to fill in the chart with me. The *Somebody* refers to the main character(s) in the story. *Wants* refers to what their purpose is in the story. What do they want to do or accomplish? *But*, refers to the obstacles that get in the way for that character. *So*, refers to how the character(s) overcame their obstacles to succeed at the task, or how they dealt with any obstacles in general. *Finally*, refers to how the story ended and what became of the character and if there were any lessons to be learned from what happened in the story. I called on students to participate in helping me fill the chart out for both of the books that week. By the time we completed the second one, Reid deduced, “Hey, this is the same as what we were doing at the fireplace. The questions are almost the same!” I looked at him with a bit of a grin and feigned surprise, “Really?” I said. “Geez, what a coincidence, huh?” (Poladian, 2008a). The class eventually all made that connection.

The next phase of the activity was modeling for them how the information in the graphic organizer can then be used as a guide when writing out a personalized summary of events. I demonstrated this with chart paper, and had students formulate each sentence I would write on the chart paper. I encouraged them to find ways of expanding on a thought and providing their own input to some of the sections. *Two voices are better than one!* I would always say when guiding them to find evidence to support a position. With little struggle we were able to pull off the task and create a much clearer and more detailed summary of a story than most of my students were used to. I asked them in the end if the graphic organizer helped them to better think through what they wanted to write. The answers were overwhelmingly favourable. “It was a lot easier,” Jesse said. “If I forgot what I was going to say next, I could just look on the chart,” said Brendan. Of course, doing this with the class still seemed like I was doing the majority of the work. I was geared to see what they would do if they had to do it in a small group or on their own without my help.

By the end of the second week, I knew that my time was running out. I had one more day to work on what I had started as I realized the coming week was filled with provincial testing, a field trip, a guest speaker, and track and field activities and spirit events. My schedule would be severely compromised. Thus, I had to come to terms with how this research was going to end. I was not satisfied with ending mid stream. I was unsure whether I could fully justify the success of my research without assessing each student individually. Needless to say, with deeper reflection I came to terms with the parameters I was using to judge success. In my mind, success was seeing that my students (the boys specifically) had taken a vested interest in their reading activities. I had. Success was seeing positive contributions to group discussions centering around reading activities. I had. Success was seeing the boys show interest in their reading based on the sharing of opinions about what they had read. I had. Success was about seeing them become more interested in reading. I had. All in all, I felt that even without the definitive final numbers of the CASI test re-administered, I had reason to label my research a success. I did however have time for a group activity, where I strategically grouped the boys and the girls separately. I provided them with the CASI reading book, and said, “*Ok... the only thing you have to do for me is read a story and complete a summary of that story from beginning to end, and I only require a group answer, not individual ones.*” I did get a few groans and comments like, “*I thought you said you weren’t testing us;* and “*do we have to?*” (Poladian, 2008a). I reminded them that I could have them do the entire CASI test individually, but I chose not to, because I thought this would be less stressful and a quick way for them to show me how much they have learned from the activities of the past few weeks. Ultimately, they conceded. First, I had the boys and girls vote on a separate reading selection. I then set up their task as a competition of sorts. In so doing, I threw out the concept of “redemption” to the boys with regards to bridging the gap with the girls. I asked, “*are you up to the challenge?*” (Poladian, 2008a). They were indeed. The boys chose, “Owls in the Family” and the girls chose “Letters from the Future”. They were given twenty minutes to read the story, 20 minutes to talk about the story with each other using the original discussion questions I had provided for them last week when they were discussing their own personal reading. After that, each group of four or five selected a recorder and they set out to create and fill in a “Summary” graphic organizer.

Once the graphic organizer was done, someone else in the group was selected as the “writer” and the remaining group of “Thinkers and Sharers” helped to formulate the point form information from the chart into clear, concise sentences that articulated everything they wanted to say to summarize the story. In the end, I was so pleased with what the group effort brought in. The boy’s specifically took ownership of the activity and their final results showed significant improvement of what I perceive they would have done individually, prior to these activities. *Appendix L* illustrates a collection of photographs taken during the process and the final piece of writing from one group of four boys that I was particularly pleased with.

Summary and Next Steps:

On the Monday of the last week of school, I watched my students participating in fun activities centering around Primary Play Day. They were asked to be leaders and run the activities for the Grades K-4. As I watched them lead, and take charge of their respective activities, putting particular care in making sure everything ran smoothly, encouraging the young ones in the group to participate and put forth their best efforts, an overwhelming sense of pride enveloped me. It wasn’t that I was just proud of how well they were doing in this activity, but how much each of them showed me that these are students who care about things, who have a vision of how things should be, who are social beings that can see varying perspectives on people and events, understand the power of encouragement and perseverance. I saw first hand how as a group, they put this philosophy to practice not only on the playground, but in the classroom. The challenge I placed upon them this month was accepted and carried through. I especially saw my boys motivated by some of the changes I made in the classroom, as well as with the extra attention I was placing on them. I would have liked to have had an additional week to see how much more data I might have been able to collect to contribute to my overall findings, but I am pleased with how far we have come. As I establish the framework for September in the final weeks of the summer, I will be revisiting this paper, and analyzing how I approach my literacy program in the classroom with probing questions such as, “Am I considering student motivation for learning with what I am asking them to do? Am I using high yield strategies consistently to not just meet the specific needs of the boys, but of all students in my classroom?”

I am encouraged to bring more reading into my classroom on a regular basis. Building my classroom library, and creating more frequent opportunities for my students to read are important first steps in improving literacy. Notwithstanding my students’ developing comprehension skills, I will also need to focus on their ability to write their thoughts clearly and concisely. Like everything else, writing takes practice. I believe that the more opportunities that are available for students to write, practice and reinforce their skills, learning will improve. There are many facets of boys’ literacy that I did not consider in this study. Factors such as the impact of technology, parental involvement, media and gaming, sports, and athletics all play a significant role in the lives of most young boys today. I also think they play a significant role in establishing programs that are meaningful and provide motivation.

Effective programs for raising the level of student achievement also address the professional growth of teachers and the role of the school as an agent of change. As I will be working with a new teaching partner next year, I hope to work with her in developing programming for our students given the current data I have collected. I intend to collect and use data to inform my practice as the months progress, and I also intend to be an active contributor to future Professional Learning Community meetings in order to do my part in promoting to my colleagues and administrators that good pedagogy requires us to ask ourselves the following questions: How well are we doing? How do we compare with similar schools? What more should we aim to achieve? What must we do to reach our goals? How will we measure our progress? As the summer commences, there is plenty of time to rest, and then consider how I intend to continue forward with this study. By starting at the beginning of the year, I will be able to encompass more areas of the literacy program within my research, and hopefully by the time my students leave me next June, they will have shown significant growth, strengthened confidence, renewed interest, and an improved sense of self as a learner. This assignment further enhanced my trust and belief in the action research process. As I conclude this second action research project of my teaching career, I am pleasantly reminded that no matter how daunting a task seemed, no matter how difficult the road ahead appeared, I am forever thankful for the support and partnership of a tremendous group of individuals who have taught me that critical friends and co-researchers are truly invaluable at helping to make the impossible possible.

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*available upon request

Appendix A: Student Enrolment: Grand Erie District School Board: 2007



Enrolments - October 31, 2007

	J.K.	S.K.	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Sp.Ed.	TOTAL	F.T.E.	Sect. 20	2007/08 FTE Projected Total	Diff. from Projected	FOS
A.G. Hodge PS	44	43	46	50	40	51	55	50	42	53	6	480	436.50		442.00	-5.50	1
Anna Melick Memorial PS	8	9	10	9	8	9	17	16	20	19		125	116.50		130.50	-14.00	2
Banbury Heights PS	37	38	43	56	36	46	46	36	38	57	8	441	403.50		404.00	-0.50	1
Bellview PS	24	27	46	44	36	23	41	22			8	271	245.50		257.50	-12.00	1
Bethel PS						34	33	31	28	39		165	165.00		154.00	11.00	1
Bloomsburg PS	28	23	28	28	24	22	25	31			7	216	190.50		184.00	6.50	2
Boston PS	10	23	25	26	28	20	25	30				187	170.50		176.50	-6.00	2
Branlyn PS	23	34	36	48	42	40	47	51	38	50	7	416	387.50		387.00	0.50	1
Brier Park PS	21	35	38	35	43	54	45	58	59	53		441	413.00		425.00	-12.00	1
Burford District ES	22	49	17	36	28	34	43	38	49	40	11	367	331.50		334.00	-2.50	1
Caledonia Centennial PS	19	20	16	24	27	31	34	31	38	33	11	284	264.50		274.00	-9.50	2
Cedarland PS	28	25	35	36	38	38	41	36	50	35	11	373	346.50		350.50	-4.00	1
Centennial-Grand Woodland PS	29	16	23	24	24	22	22	24	22	24	15	245	222.50		221.00	1.50	1
Central PS	11	20	25	24	22	14	17	17	20	17		187	171.50		162.00	9.50	1
Coronation PS						55	45	39	52	45	24	260	260.00		265.00	-5.00	1
Courtland PS	27	24	23	33	25	17	30	30	22	30	12	273	247.50		254.00	-6.50	2
Delhi PS	29	41	39	38	49	51	55	45			8	355	320.00		316.00	4.00	2
Doverwood PS	35	35	39	33	50	46	43	60			6	347	312.00		313.00	-1.00	2
Dufferin PS	51	47	48	39	31	33	26	13	16	17		321	272.00		298.00	-26.00	1
Dunnville Central PS	15	13	11	17	8	20	9	15	23	16		147	133.00		134.50	-1.50	2
Echo Place PS	17	20	12	8	16	12	12	13	13	20		143	124.50		125.00	-0.50	1
Elgin Avenue PS	20	23	27	38	34	29	38	46	41	38	19	353	331.50		344.50	-13.00	2
Fairview Avenue PS	24	31	35	42	30	33	31	31	27	30	21	335	307.50		318.00	-10.50	2
Fairview Brantford PS	46	42	51	57	31	27	24	27	25	21		351	307.00		311.00	-4.00	1
Glen Morris PS	12	16	17	20	21	18	17	26	20	24		191	177.00		164.00	13.00	1
Graham Bell-Victoria PS	18	21	21	25	24	22	16	21				168	148.50		166.00	-17.50	1
Grandview Central PS	15	27	28	17	16	20	18	16	30	18		205	184.00		180.50	3.50	2
Grandview PS	16	18	18	9	18	19	21	12	53	44	12	240	223.00		246.00	-23.00	1
Greenbrier PS	18	18	27	20	21	20	22	29	29	33	20	257	239.00		231.50	7.50	1
Hagersville ES	23	28	36	31	26	22	36	24	24	39	28	317	291.50		296.00	-4.50	2
Houghton PS	7	23	20	25	19	26	24	21	28	28		221	206.00		205.50	0.50	2
J. L. Mitchener PS	22	28	28	25	26	27	28	32	35	47	19	317	292.00		276.00	16.00	2
James Hillier PS	16	19	41	27	30	24	26	29	28	31	5	276	258.50	4	252.50	6.00	1
Jarvis PS	31	33	29	30	35	26	42	32	27	28		313	281.00		298.00	-17.00	2
Joseph Brant PS							8		66	69		143	143.00		140.00	3.00	1



Enrolments - October 31, 2007

	J.K.	S.K.	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Sp.Ed.	TOTAL	F.T.E.	Sect. 20	2007/08 FTE Projected Total	Diff. from Projected	FOS
King George PS	30	18	34	34	40	36	40	44	39	39		354	330.00		346.00	-16.00	1
Langton PS	19	18	17	19	22	18	28	17	34	25	15	232	213.50		210.00	3.50	2
Lansdowne-Costain PS	20	27	27	28	26	28	33	49	40	35		313	289.50		288.50	1.00	1
Lynndale Heights ES	30	31	43	27	32	41	37	38	49	43	23	394	363.50		368.00	-4.50	2
Major Ballachey PS	22	19	17	26	14	20	22	23	22	17	27	229	208.50		213.00	-4.50	1
Mount Pleasant PS	11	20	20	23	22	24	28	28	24	16		216	200.50		207.50	-7.00	1
North Ward PS	40	48	37	49	44	52	52	51	43	58	12	486	442.00		433.00	9.00	1
Oakland-Scotland PS	17	22	23	20	15	22	25	20	35	14		213	193.50		192.50	1.00	1
Oneida Central PS	24	22	23	28	21	22	23	31	28	28		250	227.00		227.00	0.00	2
Onondaga-Brant PS	20	14	18	22	18	19	16	24	27	26		204	187.00		178.00	9.00	1
Paris Central PS	21	21	19	19	23	25	19	25	27	26		225	204.00		205.50	-1.50	1
Port Dover Comp ES									63	64		127	127.00		130.00	-3.00	2
Port Rowan PS	30	23	31	34	27	40	29	43	34	36		327	300.50		292.50	8.00	2
Prince Charles PS	25	34	23	24	30	38	29	21	34	34	13	305	275.50		272.50	3.00	1
Princess Elizabeth PS	29	21	22	29	24	14	24	21				184	159.00	7	156.50	2.50	1
Queen's Ward PS	30	33	42	31	38							174	142.50		139.50	3.00	1
Rainham Central PS	21	27	29	17	33	37	29	36	39	32		300	276.00		281.50	-5.50	2
River Heights ES	55	66	65	45	68	52	53	64	39	70		577	516.50		504.50	12.00	2
Russell Reid PS	24	32	46	39	37							178	150.00		168.00	-18.00	1
Ryerson Heights ES	87	57	69	69	45	56	56	43	51	46	10	589	517.00		437.50	79.50	1
Seneca Central PS	16	15	15	23	13	22	20	23	28	20		195	179.50		180.00	-0.50	2
St. George-German PS	31	38	46	33	42	38	44	59	44	53		428	393.50		384.00	9.50	1
Teeterville PS	17	16	19	19	17	19	24	24				155	138.50		138.50	0.00	2
Thompson Creek ES	23	29	30	17	33	34	26	37	49	46	14	338	312.00		311.00	1.00	2
Townsend PS									94	108		202	202.00		202.00	0.00	2
Walpole North ES	12	23	22	18	16	19	14	30	17	27		198	180.50		170.50	10.00	2
Walsh PS	31	25	33	26	33	35	36	34	47	51		351	323.00		325.00	-2.00	2
Waterford -A.B. Masecar PS	26	34	31	29								120	90.00		88.50	1.50	2
Waterford -W.H. Hewitt PS					45	28	37	29				139	139.00		144.00	-5.00	2
West Lynn PS	37	32	40	29	32	31	33	27	37	29		327	292.50		270.50	22.00	2
Windham PS									104	79		183	183.00		183.00	0.00	2
Woodman-Cainsville PS	18	16	25	26	37	25	24	22	37	20		250	233.00		252.00	-19.00	1

TOTAL 1,512 1,650 1,804 1,777 1,753 1,780 1,855 1,903 2,048 2,040 372 18,494 16,913.00 11 16,937.50 -24.50



Enrolments - October 31, 2007

J.K.	S.K.	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Sp.Ed.	TOTAL	F.T.E.	Sect. 20	2007/08 FTE Projected Total	Diff. from Projected	FOS
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Total JK/SK 3,162
 Total Gr. 1-8 14,960
 Total JK-Gr. 3 8,496
 Total Gr. 4-8 9,626

	Sp.Ed.	Total	F.T.E.		2007-08 Proj. Total	Diff. from Proj'd
Total for FOS#1 (Brant, Brantford)	189	10,084	9,201		9,210	-9
Total for FOS#2 (Haldimand, Norfolk)	183	8,410	7,712		7,728	-16
Total for Brantford	166	7,415	6,765		6,818	-54
Total for County of Brant	23	2,669	2,437		2,392	45
Total for Haldimand	93	3,901	3,562		3,582	-21
Total for Norfolk	90	4,509	4,151		4,146	5

Appendix B

Grand Erie Demographic Context for Elementary Schools: North Ward School

Tilting the Bar
Describing Demographics Consistently

	Factor	North Ward	Province
1	Recent Immigration - 5 years	0.3%	4.3%
2	Foreign Born - not Canada, UK or USA	3.4%	19.1%
3	Home Language - Official	99.8%	91.4%
4	Aboriginal	1.3%	1.7%
5	No High School Diploma	48.3%	45.1%
6	Some University	15.5%	21.9%
7	Lone-Parent Families	17.5%	22.0%
8	Unemployment over 25 - If children in the home	3.3%	6.5%
9	Average Family Income	\$62 065	\$62 017
10	Mobility - One Year	12.1%	13.5%
11	Mobility - Five Years	37.9%	41.2%
12	Detached Homes	67.3%	65.6%

Demographic Marker

Province 50

Board 41

North Ward 46

Appendix C

**Absences/Lates; Grade 6 Boys
North Ward School (Sept-May 2007-2008)**

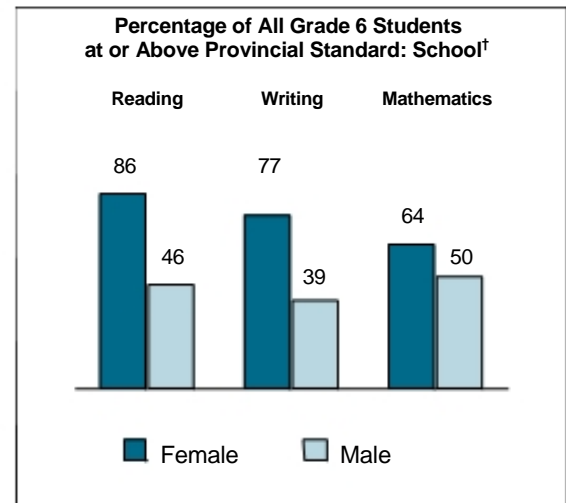
Student	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Total
A	0.5/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/2	0/0	0.5/0
B	0.5/0	2.5/0	1/0	1/0	1/0	1/0	2/0	0/0	1/0	10/0
C	0/0	1/1	1/0	0/0	2/0	3/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	7/1
D	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/0	1/0	2/0	0/0	1/0	5/0
E	1/0	0/1	1/0	0/0	0.5/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	4.5/1
F	0/0	2/0	1/0	0/0	0/1	1/0	0.5/0	0/0	0/0	4.5/1
G	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/1	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/1
H	0/1	1/1	1/1	0/0	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	3/3
I	0/1	1/0	0.5/1.5	0/0	1.5/0	0/0	1/1	0/0	0/1	4/4.5
J	0/1	0/1	0.5/0	6/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/0	9.5/2
K	0/0	0.5/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	3/0	0/0	3.5/0
L	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/0	0/0	5/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	6/2

Appendix D: School Report: North Ward

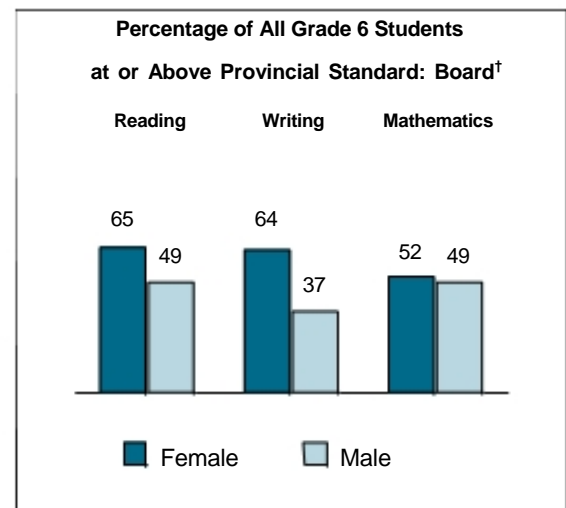
Results in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, 2006-2007

Grade 6: Gender^{††}

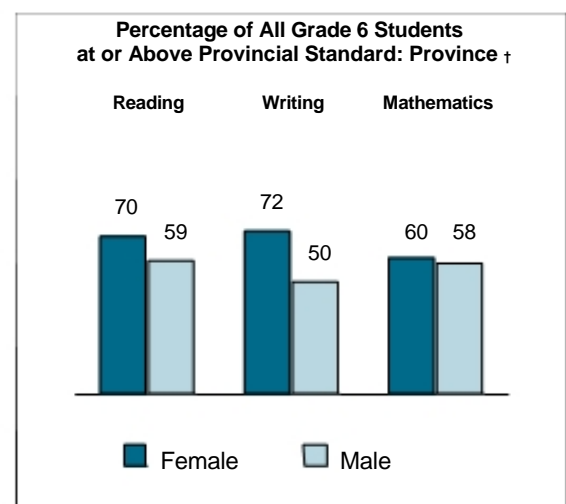
Grade 6: School*						
Number of Students	Reading		Writing		Mathematics	
	Female 22	Male 28	Female 22	Male 28	Female 22	Male 28
Level 4	18%	0%	0%	0%	5%	4%
Level 3	68%	46%	77%	39%	59%	46%
Level 2	9%	21%	18%	39%	27%	29%
Level 1	5%	25%	0%	18%	9%	18%
NE1**	0%	7%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Participating Students	100%	100%	100%	96%	100%	96%
No Data	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exempt	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	4%
At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)	86%	46%	77%	39%	64%	50%



Grade 6: Board*						
Number of Students	Reading		Writing		Mathematics	
	Female 1 048	Male 1 091	Female 1 048	Male 1 091	Female 1 048	Male 1 091
Level 4	6%	2%	6%	1%	7%	5%
Level 3	59%	47%	58%	36%	45%	44%
Level 2	24%	32%	32%	53%	37%	36%
Level 1	6%	12%	2%	5%	8%	9%
NE1**	1%	3%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%
Participating Students	97%	96%	97%	96%	97%	95%
No Data	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
Exempt	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%
At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)	65%	49%	64%	37%	52%	49%



Grade 6: Province*						
Number of Students	Reading		Writing		Mathematics	
	Female 70 863	Male 75 036	Female 70 863	Male 75 036	Female 70 863	Male 75 036
Level 4	10%	5%	10%	4%	11%	12%
Level 3	61%	53%	62%	46%	49%	47%
Level 2	21%	27%	24%	41%	31%	30%
Level 1	4%	8%	1%	3%	5%	6%
NE1**	1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Participating Students	97%	94%	97%	94%	96%	94%
No Data	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Exempt	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%	4%
At or Above						



Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)	70%	59%	72%	50%	60%	58%
---	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

* Because percentages in tables are rounded, percentages may not add to 100.

** See the Explanation of Terms.

† These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the rounded percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4. †† Results by gender include only students for whom gender data were available.

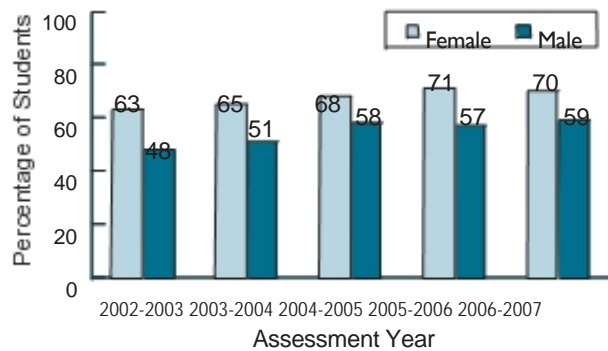
Appendix E Trends by Gender*

Percentage of all Grade 6 students at or above the provincial standard

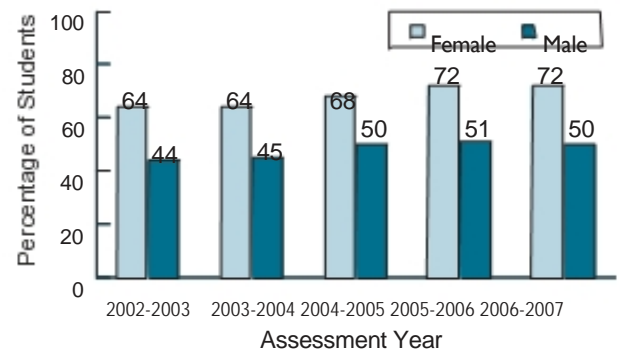
Gender	2002-2003		2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007											
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male										
Students	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%						
READING	70 297	63%	73 155	48%	70 913	65%	74 095	51%	68 858	68%	72 537	58%	70 984	71%	75 697	57%	70 863	70%	75 036	59%
WRITING	70 297	64%	73 155	44%	70 913	64%	74 094	45%	68 858	68%	72 537	50%	70 984	72%	75 697	51%	70 863	72%	75 036	50%
MATHEMATICS	70 297	55%	73 155	52%	70 913	60%	74 094	56%	68 858	60%	72 537	60%	70 984	62%	75 697	59%	70 863	60%	75 036	58%

* Results by gender include only students for whom gender data were available.

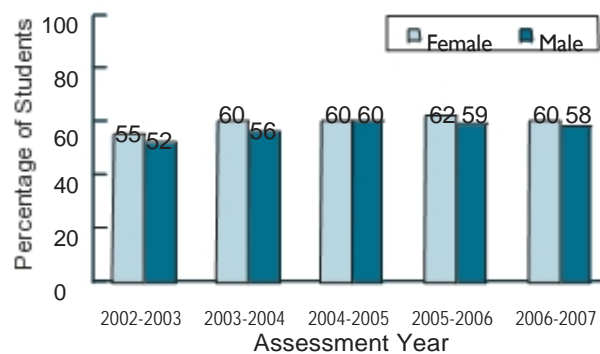
Reading



Writing



Mathematics



Observations

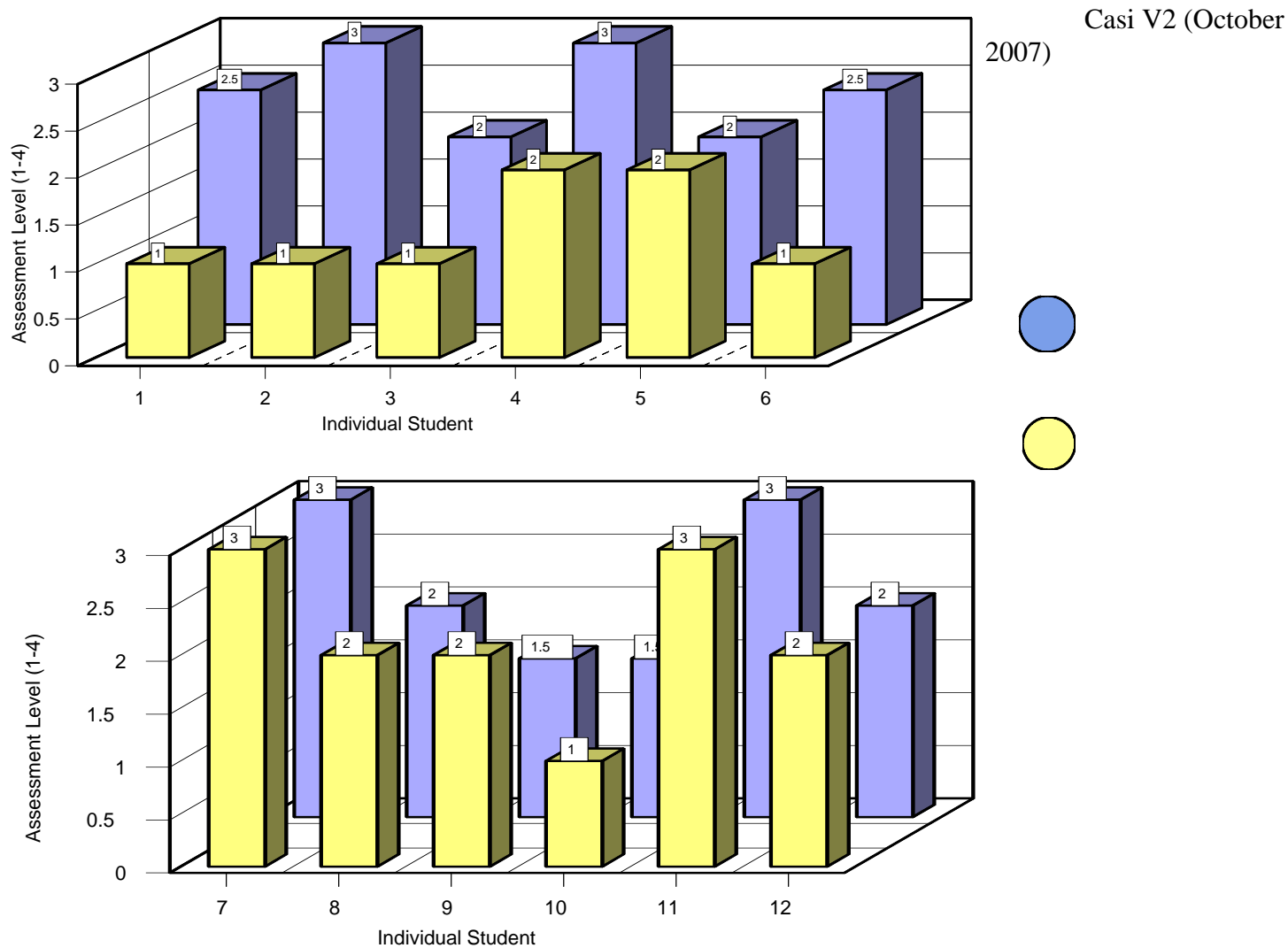
- In 2006-2007, more Grade 6 female than male students performed at or above the provincial standard in all three subjects: reading—males 59%, females 72%; mathematics—males 58%, females 60%; writing—males 50%, females 70%.

Over the past five years, the gender gap in favour of females has remained relatively consistent and is particularly pronounced in reading and writing.

Appendix F

CASE v2 and Report Card Data (2007-2008: MALES ONLY)
 Results, Terms 1-3):

Report Card '07-08 (Mean
 Language Only



Appendix G

CASI Version 2 2007 Report for Grade 6 Students: Male Only

Student	Passage	Text	Q1	Q4	Q5	Q2	Q5	Q8	Q3	Q7	Score	Level
A	2	F	2	NE	1	1	1	2	1	1	10	1
B	2	F	1	NE	1	2	2	NE	1	1	8	1
C	2	F	2	NE	1	2	1	NE	4	1	11	1
D	7	NF	2	NE	1	2	2	NE	4	2	13	2
E	10	F	2	NE	2	1	1	2	2	2	12	2
F	7	NF	1	NE	NE	1	NE	NE	2	2	6	1
G	7	NF	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	16	2
H	10	F	2	3	2	1	2	NE	3	1	14	2
I	7	NF	1	NE	NE	1	NE	1	1	2	8	1
J	10	F	NE	NE	1	2	1	2	3	2	10	1
K	10	F	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	22	3
L	2	F	2	1	2	2	2	2	4	2	18	2

October, 2007

Appendix H

DIAGNOSTIC READING ASSESSMENT SURVEYS

(*percentage of students who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

Indicator	EQAO Question-airre (May 2007)	Indicator	Casi v2 (May 2008)
I believe that I am a good reader	59%	I am a good reader	33%
		I think nonfiction is easier to read than fiction	42%
		I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something	8%
		Reading is important for subjects like science, writing, social studies, art, or math	92%
I like to read	30%	I enjoy reading at home	42%
		I read for enjoyment	42%
		I read to learn about things that interest me	75%
		I enjoy going to the library	17%
		I choose books to read that other people have recommended	50%
		When I enjoy a particular book, I try to find more books by the same author	58%
I read by myself at home	37%	Reading is something I do just for school	12%
I read with someone older than myself at home	4%	I enjoy listening to someone read aloud	83%
		It takes me a long time to read most things	42%
		My family reads at home	25%
I often use a computer for reading at school	11%		
		Reading is boring	58%

Appendix I

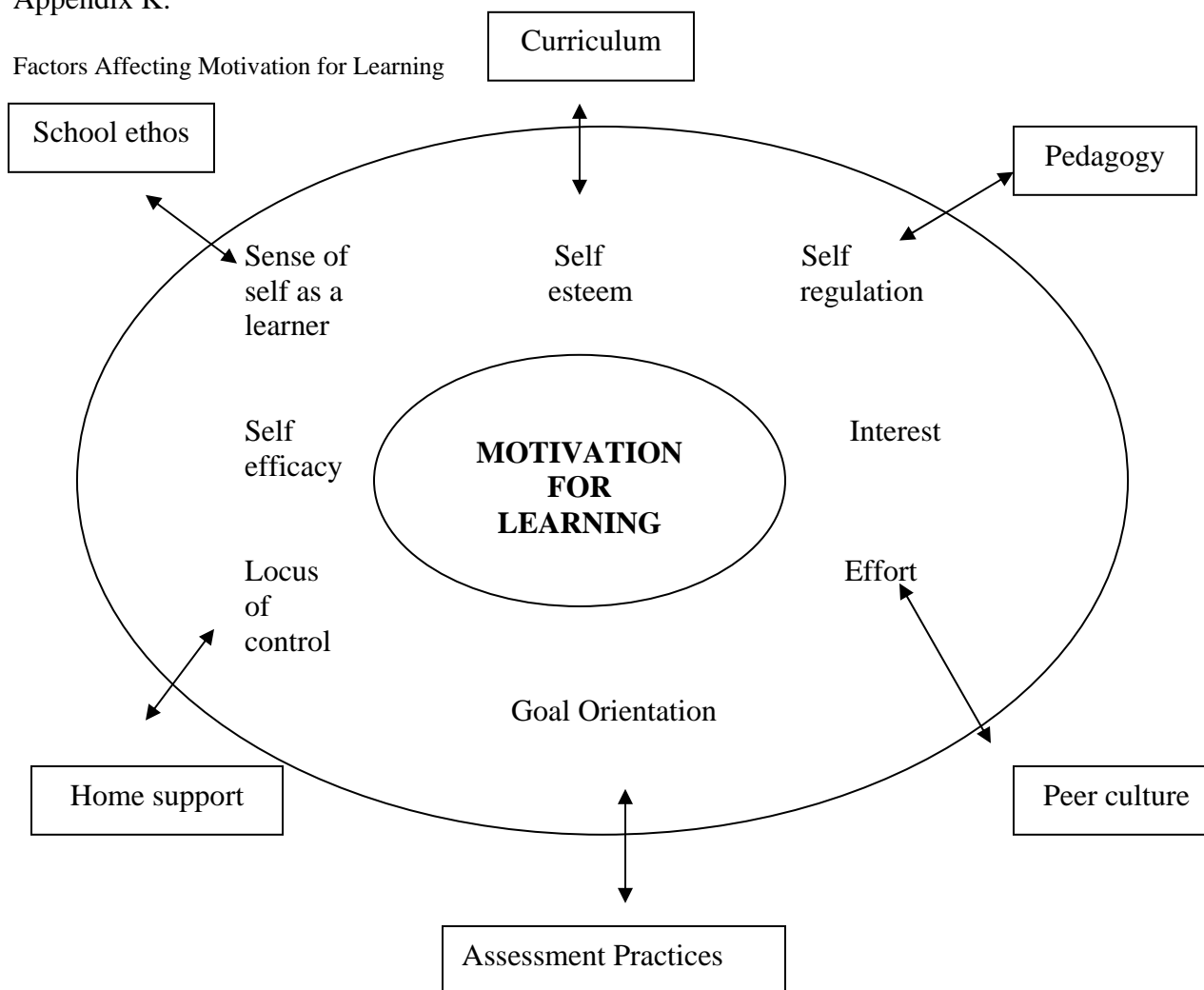
MALE STUDENTS' READING INTEREST – CASI v2

(* percentage of students who indicated on a scale of 1-3, where 3 represents the highest level of interest)

TYPES OF READING				TOPICS	
Number of Male Students Surveyed = 12					
Fiction		Nonfiction			
	Percentage rated "3"		Percentage rated "3"		Percentage rated "3"
fantasy	17%	magazines	50%	math	17%
picture books	25%	biographies	33%	art	50%
fables	8%	letters/emails	25%	games	75%
novels	67%	maps	0%	music	17%
legends	50%	fact books	42%	history	33%
poems	0%	autobiographies	33%	cars	58%
adventures	83%	textbooks	0%	romance	8%
folktales	25%	diaries/journals	17%	friendships	17%
mysteries	75%	manuals	33%	crafts/hobbies	33%
myths	50%	experiments	42%	sports	58%
comic books	42%	interviews	17%	war	50%
science fiction	17%	newspapers	17%	human body	8%
humour	67%	recipes	17%	pets	25%
riddles/jokes	50%			wild animals	42%
horror	42%			plants	8%
				computer/tech	50%
				science	25%

Appendix K:

Factors Affecting Motivation for Learning



Self-esteem: how one values oneself as a person and as a learner

Self-efficacy: how capable one feels of succeeding in a learning task

Self-regulation: the capacity to evaluate one's own work and to make choices about what to do next

Goal-Orientation: whether one's goal is to learn in order to understand or to perform well on tests (which may not reflect secure learning)

Interest: the pleasure from and engagement with learning

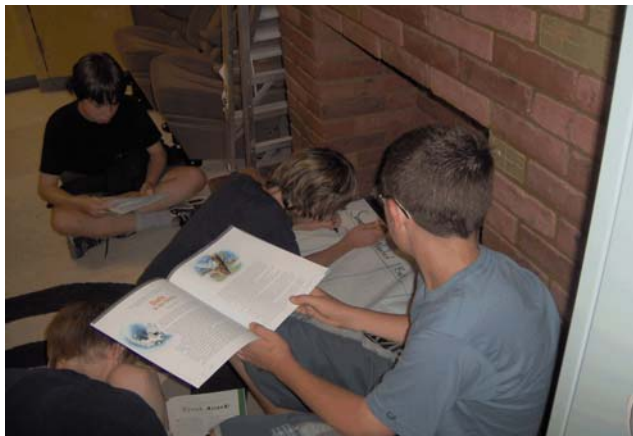
Effort: how much one is prepared to try and persevere

Locus of Control: how much one feels in control of learning as apposed to it being directed by others

Sense of self as a learner: how confident one feels of being able to learn from the classroom experiences provided

Source: *Testing, motivation and learning.* University of Cambridge School of Education. (©2002 Assessment Reform Group)

Appendix L

Student Photographs: Using Graphic Organizers and Completing Summaries

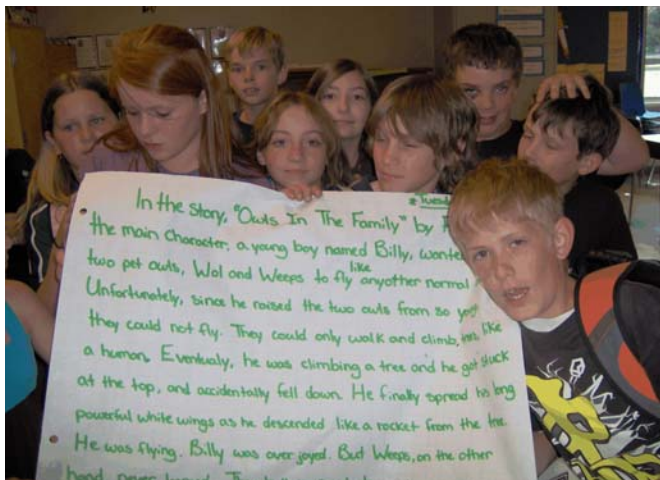
Sitting by the fireplace to read. My students were very excited to be able to sit in the “special spot” during independent reading, especially the boys.



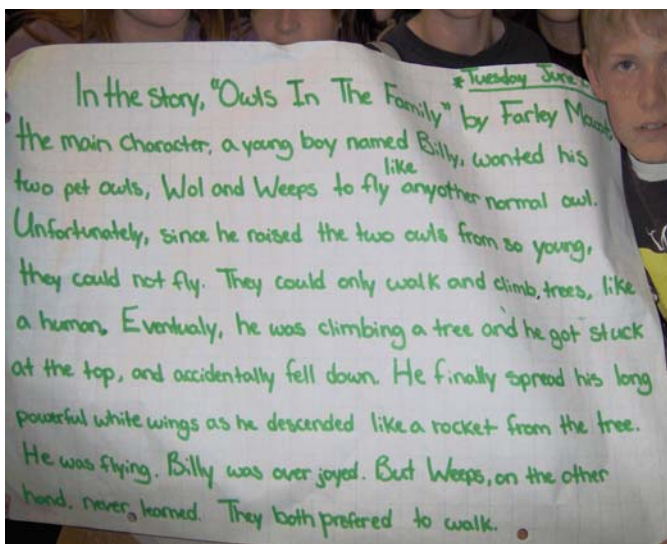
Reid working hard as the “recorder” for his group in order to complete the Summary Graphic Organizer



Brock is the “recorder” in his group. The dialogue created between the members stayed on task and remained cooperative as their Graphic Organizer was completed.



Brock's group did an excellent job in using the graphic organizer to complete the overall summary. Collectively, the summary was completed with a considerable degree of understanding.



The boy's in Brock's group display their completed summary proudly.