An Intervention Continuum

The 5th Block

The Toronto Catholic District School Board’s Balanced Literacy program has four blocks: writing, word study, shared/guided reading and self-selected reading. The 5th Block focuses on grade one and grade two at risk students who, without intervention, might ‘fall through the cracks’.

I met Jessica last September when I tested students for my “5th Block” class. Jessica was one of over 20, grade two students recommended by their grade one teachers. She was quiet, polite and did her best yet lacked skills like rhyming, manipulating sounds and recognizing patterns; skills many acquire from a childhood filled with books, nursery rhymes, songs, story time and stimulating conversation. Through a variety of diagnostic assessments, it became clear that Jessica was weak in many reading skills. Her 17 week journey began.

I taught four groups of six students each for one hour. We focused on intense word study (phonemic awareness, making words, and ‘word wall’ activities), guided and shared reading, laughter, support and lots of praise! I worked at developing oral language and taught reading strategies, encouraging students to make predictions and share experiences.
As time went on, I began to see a happier, more confident Jessica. She bounced into the room eager to learn and show what she could do. Her Running Record level progressed from A to G during our time together. In February I began a new block with grade one children. After her intervention had ended, I saw Jessica in the school yard and she asked me why she couldn’t keep coming to “5th Block” and I told her she didn’t need me anymore. She was well on her way to becoming a successful reader.

Adriana van Ineveld, TCDSB

Junior Literacy Intervention

Junior Literacy Intervention Teacher is a new program at TCDSB for students who need short term support in reading fluency and comprehension. Through this program, we teach students to become strategic readers. For half a school year, students are withdrawn daily for an hour, in groups of six to eight. Junior literacy teachers receive comprehensive professional development and mentorship. Student assessment informs program planning.

Read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, literature circles and word study are used to teach reading strategies as presented in the “Literacy in the Middle Grades” document. Students’ progress is monitored and students are assessed at the beginning and end of the program to determine success and future planning.

Anna Afheldt, St. Brigid’s School, TCDSB

Think Literacy

The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario and Cross-Curricular Approaches Grades 7 – 12 (commonly referred to as Think Literacy) are two important resources that have recently appeared on the Ontario Expert Panel on Students at Risk which was comprised of educational leaders from across the province in consultation with the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The Think Literacy resources target the student deemed to be ‘at risk’ in grades seven to twelve. In the past ten years, it has become increasingly evident that a particular group of Ontario students is not meeting with academic success, and consequently, they are not attaining many of their post-secondary goals.
SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS

Recognizing this, the Expert Panel advocates a philosophy that recognizes “the vital importance of giving all students hope for the future” (The Report of the Expert Panel, 3).

Grounded in current research on literacy, the Expert Panel stresses the importance of cross-curricular literacy skills. The Think Literacy resource is designed to meet the specific literacy needs of “at risk” students as well as the needs of their teachers. This user-friendly resource is divided into three sections: Reading Strategies, Writing Strategies and Oral Communication. Each section is accessible to all teachers — including content area teachers — because of its simple organization, clear articulation of what teachers do and what students do with each strategy, and most importantly, because it matches practical content area examples with most strategies.

Think Literacy was introduced to Ontario educators in autumn 2003. Since then, various Think Literacy initiatives have unfolded and continue to unfold. Perhaps the greatest value of Think Literacy rests in the fact it complements many innovative, literacy programs currently in place, such as Literacy in the Middle Grades, Literature Circles initiatives, After School Literacy Programs and Success for All.

Michael Kunka, Literacy Resource Teacher, TCDSB

CROSS CURRICULAR HOOKS AT MARYVALE PUBLIC SCHOOL

Gym makes me feel physically active and mentally alert. — Sam

What drives me is drama/theatre. It’s what I love to do. — Brandon

I enjoy the arts subjects because they require a lot of creativity and imagination. It’s just a shame that we don’t have many supplies for it. — Cassandra

What motivates me is football. I love football. That’s what keeps me from faking sick every day. — Matthew

I enjoy reading the most when I have people to discuss the book with. — Shannon

What keeps me in school would be the hands on stuff. For me it is really interesting to experience what we are learning. — Klaudia

My hook is music. — Victoria

What motivates me is the freedom to work with real things. I’d much rather do an experiment than write about it or copy out stuff from a text book. — Jordan

I would like to be able to go on more field trips that have to do with education. — Jack
Supporting Students at Risk Using Drama and Dance

The Drama/Dance PAIR Project is a Toronto District School Board Drama/Dance Department school-based residency program designed to provide curriculum support and teacher training to teachers. The schools involved welcome drama/dance artists and instructional leaders into their schools as drama/dance curriculum partners. The lead teachers receive six, half days with a drama/dance artist in their classrooms, as well a full day of in-service prior to the classroom visit. The drama/dance work uses stories, poetry and themes that are directly connected to the elementary classroom curriculum.

At the end of the first year of the project, teachers were asked to reflect on aspects that had been most supportive of student learning. Here’s what they said:

- Students are enthusiastic about coming to school. It gives students who don’t find reading and writing easy and meaningful an opportunity to express themselves and shine. This boosts their self-esteem and motivation to learn more.
- The PAIR project makes my lessons richer and more meaningful for both me and my students. It helps me reach outside the box, giving me ideas to expand, deepen and broaden a lesson by incorporating a kinesthetic learning style. This element gives them another opportunity to understand what I’m teaching.

Learning curriculum through drama and dance is powerful and engaging. Walter Pitman, in “Learning Through the Arts in an Age of Uncertainty”, makes a plea to educators to integrate the arts into curriculum. He quotes research that shows “children are fully engaged when drama, music, literature and the full range of media and communications technology are integrated into all aspects of teaching and learning” (195). This is what will “stimulate young people to investigate many ways of knowing and many kinds of human experience” (201). Ultimately, this is what teachers hope to do.

Catherine Combs, Instructional Leader in Drama and Dance, TDSB

Literacy Across the Curriculum

Literacy/Design & Technology Connections at Kane Public School

The students at Kane Middle School are extremely lucky to have an outstanding Design & Technology program. Many of the children who struggle with the academic curriculum at school flourish and excel in the D & T environment. Curriculum comes to life for them...
as they use real life applications to learn curriculum expectations. Each year the students are taught the concepts of perimeter and area in mathematics. They build on what they’ve already learned by designing a floor plan for a home. They need to understand perimeter and area for their plans to be successful.

D&T class lets students who excel at school take their learning to the next level. Many went on to learn a computer program, such as 3D Home Architect, used by professional builders to build dream houses. Mr. Camilleri, the D & T teacher, has difficulty getting the students out of his shop! They are often there before school, during lunch and after school perfecting their projects.

Rob Brogno, Kane Public School Guidance Teacher, TDSB

Thoughts from Students

“Reading and writing are very important in Design and Technology classes because you have to do a lot of reading and writing in that class — like when you are calculating a piece of wood. You need to know those skills to compare one thing to the next or compare it to the instruction so you’ll be able to know if what you’re doing is right or wrong.”

— Jaleesha

The main point is that reading and writing helps us get to where we want in life. In a tech class, that’s where I think you really need to know how to read and write because everything you write down (record) has to be understood.

— Matthew

I like design and technology classes because they are very interactive. It’s not just reading and writing, it’s hands on skills. Design and technology class motivates me a lot. Things that I learned from tech class I apply at home.

— Shinel

When you are taking notes in D & T, you have to write and when you are reading instructions, you have to read big time.

— Sujan
As members of the Outreach Committee, we are enthusiastic about the various projects we have undertaken over the years. It is through the support of the conference delegates that we can continue to provide funds for worthwhile causes both locally and internationally.

The Association is proud to have supported the following projects for 2003-2004:

- Frontier College in support of literacy training for migrant workers.
- Rosalie Hall, a Parent Resource Centre, through bursaries for graduates planning to attend a university or college.
- Early childhood and toddler books for a parenting centre in Attawapiskat, a First Nations community on the James Bay.
- Bucana Learning Centre in Davao, Philippines partnering with David Lewis School in TDSB. The children at David Lewis filled backpacks with educational materials and each kindergarten child at the Learning Centre received one.
- Libraries for Afghanistan through Women for Women in Afghanistan.

We look forward to continuing our work and are presently looking into opportunities for 2004-2005.

Vangie Kalanderopoulos
Chair, Outreach Committee

This book is a valuable resource for finding practical strategies to motivate and program for low-achieving students. It offers the best research-based practice on the literacy learning and teaching of struggling readers and writers. It is classroom-based and grounded in Dorothy Strickland’s sound, developmentally-appropriate principles of literacy learning. The book recognizes the rich cultural and linguistic diversity in our classrooms and provides strategies for building on these strengths to help all students develop the skills needed for effective communication.

The authors review the use of active strategies that make for successful readers and writers and provide instructional frameworks for focused intervention. These frameworks allow teachers to differentiate instruction and accommodate the needs of all learners. The book describes many strategies from scaffolded instruction to story mapping and grammar. The strategies for supporting writing place teacher modeling at the centre of the writing-process approach and ensure that struggling writers have the practical tools for writing at their fingertips. The authors recognize that strategies have to be revisited often and in different ways, and especially with students having difficulties, stating, “instruction in strategies must be insistent, consistent and persistent.”

Part Two features a ‘strategy bank’ which provides instructional and assessment strategies and home/school connections which highlight shared goal-setting by the child, parent and teacher. A resources section lists books for Readers’ Theatre and Read Aloud/Think Aloud Instruction.

Take a look at this helpful resource. You’ll find a wealth of tried and true strategies for engaging struggling readers and writers in meaningful, literacy activities.

Carol Munro, Teacher-Librarian, Selwyn Public School, TDSB

I Read It, But I Don’t Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers
Cris Tovani (Stenhouse Pub., 2000)

There are so many initiatives now requiring us to review our reading teaching methods and goals. Our educational system is forever reminding us that good reading habits are developed in the early years of our educational lives. We do not all teach young children, however. Many teach at the junior and intermediate levels. Are we to assume that if a student is not performing at grade level by this stage, there is nothing to be done? What about the student who can decode well yet is unable to restate or use the material that has been read in a meaningful manner? When teaching these levels are we as teachers to expect and accept the frustration and apathy towards reading that many students show?

These are the issues raised and discussed in “I Read It, But Don’t Get It”.

This easily read and practical book gives teaching examples and ideas for the regular classroom teacher as well as for the reading specialist. Logical reasons are given as to why students react the way they do to assignments. Assessment suggestions are demonstrated to dissipate the frustration that students feel. These assignments are practical from a teacher and student point of view. Using or modifying them to meet our students’ needs allows us to assess in concrete ways. It helps both teachers and students fulfill more of the required expectations. This book gave me a more optimistic outlook for my junior and intermediate students. It challenged me to approach them as young readers again who need a little more time and a fresh approach.

Margaret Talbot, TCDSB
Off to New Adventures

We wish to express our warmest appreciation to six former members who contributed so much over so many years. They are:

Kathy Amenta,  
Noelle Jack,  
Linda Beck,  
Ruth Sidorchuk,  
Pauline Bergia,  
and Peni Patrick-McArthur

Thanks for the memories.

Literacy Leadership . . . — continued from page 1

association. It is through your dedication and commitment that our work continues to be successful.

Planning is near completion for our 29th annual conference which will take place at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel on February 10th and 11th, 2005. We have some wonderful speakers arranged including Tony Stead, Mawi Asgedom, Richard Allington and a long-time favourite — Mary Bigler, speaking at the meal functions and at other times in the program. Christopher Paul Curtis will be our speaker for the Thursday night Awards Banquet so get your tickets early.

At this time we are accepting nominations for the East York Scarborough Annual Reading Award. Please consider nominating a colleague for this prestigious award by December 2nd. Celebrating excellence in literacy leadership within our schools benefits all of us.

I hope your first term has been a rewarding one and I look forward to seeing many of you at the conference.

Deborah Chisholm, President

Recently Joining the Executive

Six members have joined our executive this fall. Congratulations to Christine Anderson, Elizabeth Blake, Jill Eason, Marisa Liscio, Nora Lovgren and Adriana van Ineveld. Their gifts and talents will enhance our work.

Reading for the love of it 2005

Westin Harbour Castle, February 10 –11

How to register

1) Online with Visa or Mastercard at www.readingfortheloveofit.com

2) Mail your completed form with a cheque to EYS Reading Association,  
1315 Lawrence Avenue East, #309, Toronto, ON M3A 3R3

Why delay? Register today!