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Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry

Work Plan Support Booklet – October 2007

Introduction/Overview

Words from the Field...

"We have shifted from committee members to a school-wide community. We are also more reflective as practitioners. We ask, how do we adjust practice for student success?"

A.Y. Jackson Secondary School and W.O. Mitchell Public School
Ottawa Carleton District School Board.

Welcome back to a new school year and the final phase of your teacher inquiry project related to boys' literacy achievement. Congratulations to all of you on your enthusiasm and commitment to learning more about how to reach boys, for encouraging and building their enthusiasm for literacy, and for using a myriad of strategies to do so!

This year will be a consolidation of your past work and will reflect your continued progress this year - culminating in a final report for June 2008. To sustain your inquiry's effectiveness, outreach will be important. Engage colleagues in your neighbouring schools and family of schools in learning networks to identify the common ground necessary to highlight your notable successes.

Most of our teams have already submitted their 2007 Progress Reports, due in late June. For the few schools that haven't, please submit these as soon as possible. The process of completing this report will help determine your course of action this final year.

Message to Team Contacts, Principals and Board Contacts

Any day now, you will receive, via e-mail, a response to your June Progress Report 2007 entitled, **Teacher Inquiry Team Feedback**. Reports received over the summer were scrutinized and our responses to you have now been prepared. Responses to June Reports submitted more recently will soon be available. This feedback contains suggestions to guide the last months of your project. In many cases, we asked that you reconsider some key aspects of your work, modify your action plan, and then drop us a brief e-mail response to teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

Barbara Bodkin, Rose Dotten, Micki Clemens, and Shelley Stagg Peterson, OISE
teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca

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WHERE DO WE BEGIN?: Looking Back and Looking Forward

A significant amount has been accomplished through these inquiry projects and we have already gathered much to celebrate and share! You have done a great job by sending videos, artifacts, pictures, sample draft data, and stories reflecting your progress that our research team has enjoyed immensely.

This coming year presents the more difficult task of re-addressing your focus and, in some cases, narrowing and refining that focus; teaching with precision using the instructional strategies you are investigating; and somewhat 'curbing your enthusiasm' to make your data collection and analysis more manageable. You cannot do it all as part of this inquiry project and we salute you for all the strategies you have attempted. It is already October and your school activities related to this project will need to wrap up in early spring. The creation of an inquiry timeline will be crucial to your work.

Themes which repeatedly occurred from your reports this year:

1. Teams commented on the energizing impact of working with their colleagues and the satisfactory results of this collaboration – whether it was professional dialogue and growth, assessing a common piece of student work, or demonstrating a strategy for and with each other. Our understanding of how, when, and where collegial learning takes place is really broadening. We hope this continues long after this project is over.
2. You indicated a consistent review and discussion of achievement data within your inquiry teams. The shared analysis of data from report cards, EQAO, common tests and assessments, pieces of student writing, supported by the use of software to manipulate the data, and data walls to help you make better sense of it, showed strong impacts on program and instruction. These results connect to the advice provided by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and Student Success Leaders.
3. Increasingly, teams are inviting board resource staff to provide advice and to support networks and connections to other schools. We will continue raising ideas about this outreach practice as a way to sustain your learning. This year, board contact staff will receive information as our contact list is updated and made more complete.

We are looking forward to next spring and to the review of your final results and analysis. Our goal is to determine provincial trends and to identify and highlight the most successful practices.

We are continually reminded, as this project evolves, of the words of Michael Fullan, Carmel Crevola, and Peter Hill in their book entitled, *Breakthrough*, published in 2006. Many of you have read the book or have heard these authors leading learning sessions and conferences in districts around Ontario. They make the case for the three P's of precision, personalization, and professionalism. Teacher Inquiry for Boys' Literacy Achievement has all three!

Words from the field...

"Our teachers work collaboratively with each other and community members to develop strategies, problem solve, share, build resources and encourage colleagues to become involved. We proudly report we are moving toward 'closing the gap' and are busy planning for year three."

*James R. Henderson Public School
Limestone District School Board*

In *Breakthrough* the Triple P components are described as follows:

Precision – learning from the data and spending time trying to understand the data more deeply

Personalization – understanding more about the unique needs of each student in order to transform classroom instruction

Professional Learning – focused on-going learning for each teacher



This is the challenge that confronts all your teams in year three: to set a solid manageable course of work within the strong framework of an action plan; to focus participants' efforts on supporting students more precisely through their consideration of high-quality assessment data and their implementation of effective instructional practices; and to ensure reflective and consistent professional practice among all members of your inquiry team. Then to pull all the pieces together in your findings!

"Increasingly, teachers are helped in analyzing the data, receiving feedback in terms of scores and even some skill analysis. The missing step and next piece is to make sense of the whole thing in one unified picture of where each student lies in terms of where to go next." (Breakthrough, p. 20)

"You can't have personalization and precision without daily learning on the part of teachers." (Breakthrough, p. 21)

"Teacher leadership means teachers operating as 'interactive expert learners'." (Breakthrough, p. 24)

Over this year, you are invited to consider how the following questions, outlined in a September 10, 2007, Ministry of Education web-cast on "Teacher Moderation" www.curriculum.org could assist you in focusing your inquiry work in the area of data collection and in formulating your final analysis and interpretation.

- What actions could you take to support consistency in assessment practices at the classroom level and school level?
- What do you presently do to ensure that interventions are precise, prompt, and effective?
- What further actions can be taken to make interventions work effectively?

Words from the field...

"Commendations to the Ministry for allowing this opportunity for action research around reading for the children at Holy Family Catholic School. Many thanks to the literacy team for keeping us on task throughout this project. On the "Road to Reading" provided us with an opportunity for a focused professional learning community. Engaging all students to read independently created a synergy of learning for all".

Holy Family Catholic School
St. Clair Catholic District School Board





THREE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MISTAKES (and How to Avoid Them)

The following piece by researchers, Bryan Goodwin and Ceri Dean, may have merit as you work to create an action plan for your boys' literacy project for 2007-2008 and ensure coherence with your overall school improvement planning process.

Mistake #1

Treating the symptoms, not the underlying problem – Goodwin and Dean attest that in some cases planning can treat the symptoms not the root causes. As you work to improve boys' interest and achievement in literacy, it is not enough to provide just exposure to new materials. The excitement and engagement of boys with reading materials is not to be underestimated; however, specific focused teaching strategies will ultimately improve boys' literacy. The mere provision of a collection of new books is not enough.

Mistake #2

Focussing only on tangibles and ignoring intangibles – Goodwin and Dean make the case that collaboratively looking at student achievement data is one part of the equation – the other is digging deeper. Taking the time to look more deeply at the data surfaces the more intangible elements – biases, misconceptions, and assumptions, and leads to conversations about teaching strategies necessary to teach all learners. Through evidence-informed leadership, we support learning for all.

Mistake #3

Biting off more than you can chew – Again, Goodwin and Dean report that some planning efforts result in generalized action plans with broad, sweeping statements and multiple goals that result in attempts to do too much in a specified time frame. For maximum impact they suggest: define the problem, find the right solution, monitor the effectiveness, and reflect on the process to identify what actions contributed to the final results. Sounds like our teacher inquiry for sure!

*Adapted from Bryan Goodwin and Ceri Dean, "Three School Improvement Mistakes" in **Changing Schools**, Volume 55, Spring 2007. (Mid-Continent Research for Education Learning, available online at www.mcrel.org.)*

Words from the field...

"Our discussions about our students moved from 'we [teachers] have little control' to 'what we can do for our students?' - based on data we have and their strengths and reading behaviour. I likened our PLC team meetings to my experience at Sick Children's Hospital when the medical community gathered to discuss my child. Our work with our students has become:

- ♦ *Planned and enthusiastic*
- ♦ *Focused and systematic*
- ♦ *Intense with short tasks*
- ♦ *Hands-on*
- ♦ *Talking and doing ("show me")*
- ♦ *Constant feedback*
- ♦ *Celebrations of success"*

*Echo Bay Central Public School
Algoma District School Board*



We have frequently discussed data collection and analysis in previous Support Booklets. The following is an index to help you find these resources and review them in 2007-2008. To download additional copies of work plan support booklets visit:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/boysliteracy.html>

DATA ANALYSIS: Index to Data Resources



March 2006. (Volume I, Issue 1)

- Page 6 ON MY OWN JOURNEY: Focus on the Classroom Teacher
- ♦ Informal discussion of qualitative data method – Chronicle

April 2006. (Volume I, Issue 2)

- Cover Page Collecting and Analyzing Data
- ♦ Key points around gathering and interpreting data
- Page 2 IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE THREE
- ♦ Collecting Data – 5 W's and H
- Page 3 STARTING YOUR DATA COLLECTION
- ♦ Before, During, After
 - ♦ Ethical Considerations
- Page 4 DEVELOPING INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
- ♦ Activity – strategy for developing Indicators of Success for your Essential Question
- Page 5/6 COLLECTING DATA: TRIANGULATION
- ♦ Triangulation chart and template
- Page 7 COLLECTING DATA: SOURCES OF DATA
- ♦ Classroom assessments, school data, interviews, observations, surveys, and questionnaires
- Page 8 IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE FOUR
- ♦ Analyzing data – purpose
 - ♦ Steps in analyzing your data
- Page 9 REVISITING YOUR CHRONICLE
- ♦ Checklist for evaluating your data
 - ♦ Bias

June 2006. PROGRESS REPORT

- Page 2/3 COLLECTING DATA
- ♦ Innovative ways of collecting and using data – examples from schools

November 2006. (Volume II, Issue 1)

- Page 6 DATA COLLECTION
- ♦ Collecting Data – qualitative and quantitative definitions
- Page 7 ANALYZING DATA
- ♦ Data walls, matrix
 - ♦ Learning from the data

December 2006. (Volume II, Issue 2)

- Page 3 DATA: Collecting, Tracking, and Analyzing
- ♦ Charts for Data tracking and analysis

April 2007. (Volume II, Issue 3)

- Page 5/6 DATA ANALYSIS: Qualitative and Quantitative
- ♦ Qualitative data collection methods – a review with tips for organizing and analyzing
 - ♦ TinkerPlots – a technological resource for depicting and analyzing data (Ministry of Education licensed software)
- Page 7 DATA ANALYSIS: Tracking Template
- ♦ Template for 3 data sources (triangulation)

DATA ANALYSIS: Revisiting Qualitative and Quantitative Data

PURPOSE

Assessment is complex, so it is not surprising that in our review of the Progress Reports submitted in June 2007, we found that there is a need to review and clarify quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis.

It is incumbent on the team leader to ensure that your team's data collection is balanced between both types of data and that each type is clearly and unequivocally related back to key aspects or components of your Essential Question.

In this way, the final report in June 2008, in which you will outline the findings of your overall inquiry, will be more solidly based and, hence, will be more persuasive in advocating for the adoption of best practices that support boys' literacy achievement.

DEFINITIONS

What does it mean to conduct quantitative and qualitative inquiry or research?

- ♦ In **Quantitative research**, the researcher decides what to study; asks specific questions; collects quantifiable data from participants; analyzes these numbers using statistics; and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased and objective approach.
- ♦ In **Qualitative research**, the researcher relies on the views and opinions of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a more subjective manner.

CHARACTERISTICS

What are the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative approaches?

Data Approaches	Characteristics
Quantitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ An emphasis on collecting and analyzing information in the form of numbers ♦ An emphasis on collecting scores that measure distinct attributes of individuals and organizations
Qualitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ An emphasis on listening to the views of participants in our studies ♦ An emphasis on asking general, open questions and collecting data in places where people live and work

COLLECTING DATA

What are the specific assessment methods/strategies for collecting data on boys' achievement and on boys' perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes?

Data Approaches	Data Assessment Methods/Strategies
Quantitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Collecting data using instruments with preset questions and response; e.g., student test scores – EQAO; PM Benchmarks; CASI; DRA; Concepts about Print; classroom assessments ♦ Gathering quantifiable (numeric) data; e.g., student work – retellings, portfolios, scored writing samples; surveys/inventories/questionnaires – number of library books checked out by boys; number of hours spent reading at home; number of books read independently; numbers of boys who stay or drop-out of a program ♦ Collecting information from a large number of individuals; e.g., all boys in Junior Division; all boys in the inquiry project; all boys in the book club; all parents of boys in a classroom; all the teachers in the inquiry team; all the peer mentors <p>We recommend you determine a reasonable and manageable number sufficient to support reliable results.</p>

COLLECTING DATA (continued)

Qualitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting data using forms with general emerging questions to permit the participant to generate his or her responses; e.g., surveys/inventories/questionnaires – reading interest inventories; attitudinal surveys on reading and writing Gathering word (text) or image (picture) data; e.g., observations, reports - teachers' chronicles; reports from students, parents, principals; minutes of team meetings; classroom vignettes; verbatim comments, quotes, audiotapes; images - videotapes; photos Collecting information from a small number of individuals or sites; e.g., interviews/focus groups/surveys – sampling of the boys' personal observations and perceptions of the texts, teaching strategies, assessment tasks; sampling of parents for changes in boys' practices, attitudes; sampling of the reading buddies/peer models/mentors to gather their opinions of their work
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ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING DATA

How will you analyze and interpret the data you have collected?

Data Approaches	Data Analysis
Quantitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consists of statistical analysis Involves describing trends, comparing group differences, or relating variables; e.g., different strategies, percentage of ELL students Interpretation consists of comparing results with prior predictions and past research; e.g., boys' achievement results before the inquiry and after
Qualitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consists of text analysis; e.g., what themes, patterns, emerge? Involves developing a description and outlining themes; e.g., project stages, identified teaching strategies, timeline of data collection, production of student/teacher materials, scope of professional collaboration Interpretation consists of describing the larger meaning of the findings; e.g., using the process of triangulation to reveal/confirm key findings

REPORTING AND EVALUATING INQUIRY FINDINGS

What is the impact of the work you have done? Did your implementation of changes in the environment, resources, teaching strategies, assessment, communication, etc. impact positively on boys' achievement, perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes?

Data Approaches	Reporting and Evaluating Inquiry Findings
Quantitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research reports use standard, fixed structures and evaluative criteria; e.g., indicators of success, impact within the school, beyond the school Researchers take an objective and unbiased approach; e.g., positive results, unanticipated results, negative results
Qualitative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research reports use flexible emerging structures and evaluative criteria; e.g., what limitations were there to the inquiry, what questions remain, what further work remains to be done? Researchers take a more subjective (reflexive) approach; e.g., perceptions on the greatest improvement, overall success of key strategies

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: Teaching and Assessing Writing - What Research Says and What Teachers Can Do

by Shelly Stagg Peterson, OISE, University of Toronto

Questions about how to help boys become better writers invariably end up talking about how to get them excited about writing, which then leads to recognition that the topics and types of classroom writing assignments need to be more boy-oriented. For example, Newkirk (2002) says that teachers should consider the following preferences of boys when assigning writing projects.

- Boys generally prefer to write narratives that have the quick pace of an action movie or cartoon.
- Boys frequently enjoy writing that contains exaggerations, slapstick humour, absurdities, and sound effects for audience appeal.
- Boys tend to write narratives that show loyalties to popular youth culture.

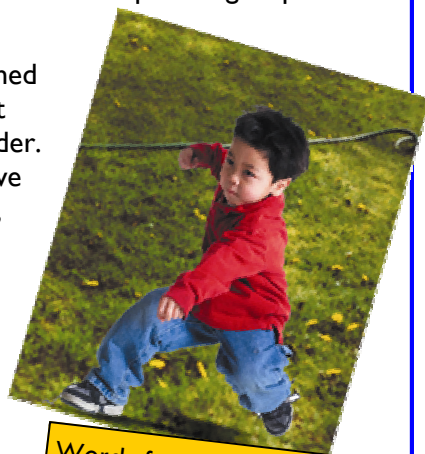
Blair and Sanford (2004) agree, adding that teachers should assign open-ended writing projects so students can use classroom writing for their own social purposes (e.g., to gain status with certain peers by making them laugh, showing their knowledge about the characters and people of popular culture, or by “grossing them out”). Others (Peterson, 2005) advocate leaving the choice of genre open to students and encouraging students to bring in the multimedia and digital technologies that they use outside the classroom. For example, students might create PowerPoint presentations to demonstrate their learning. They might also use digital video clips or digital pictures and create web sites to communicate what they have learned.

Daly, Salters and Burns (1998) caution that gender stereotypes may be strengthened when students follow their gender preferences exclusively. They recommend that teachers encourage students to consider alternative ways of expressing their gender. In a number of studies, for example, students writing in mixed-gender collaborative writing groups, and students writing for younger students of the opposite gender, elementary-aged students crossed gender lines and tempered the gender stereotypes that appeared in their writing (Anderson, 2002; Strough & Diriwächter, 2000).

Providing Feedback on Writing: The Research

Gender issues crop up not only in the way we teach writing, but also in the way we assess it. In my research with 108 grade six teachers, male and female teachers tended to write more comments that corrected and criticized samples of student writing when they thought the writer was a boy. In contrast, they wrote more open-ended questions when they thought the writer was a girl (Peterson & Kennedy, 2006). Female teachers tended to focus more on conventions and organization, whereas male teachers tended to focus more on artistic style.

In another study I did (Peterson, 1998), grade six teachers assessed selected narratives as detailed and well organized when they felt the writers were girls. Teachers also felt that girls' writing had strong, specific vocabulary, effective character development, and good use of writing conventions. They assessed the writing very differently when they felt boys had written it, describing the writing as short, lacking in detail and character development, using general vocabulary, and lacking in attention to writing conventions. The teachers were talking about the same pieces of writing. The only things that differed were their perceptions of whether the writer was female or male!



Words from the field...

“One parent told us how pleased he was to see his young son so very excited about showing him a book and being unable to wait to get home to read it.”

*Kensington Community School
Toronto District School Board*

(continued from page 8)

Providing Feedback on Writing : What Teachers Can Do

I present these results not to say that the reason for boys' lower performance on provincial writing tests is because teachers are biased. Indeed, I was very happy to find no gender patterns favouring girls in the actual scoring of the writing, except in one of five papers where teachers who felt that the writer was a girl scored the writing higher than teachers who felt the writer was a boy.

Instead of saying that we have to find a more objective way to assess writing and suppress our expectations, I invite teachers to recognize the importance of being aware of our expectations and perceptions. For example, I've been meeting with colleagues from time to time to talk about what we notice in our male and female students' writing and whether there are patterns in the way we talk about, provide feedback on, and score female and male students' writing. We're thinking of marking writing from each other's classes and comparing the grades we assign to each piece of writing to give us a sense of the range of perspectives we have on good writing.

I've also been working with teachers who are changing the scoring criteria for assessing students' writing (Peterson, Jupiter, & Taschner, 2007). In these teachers' classes, when rubrics included criteria such as trying something new or challenging, and using graphics, drawings and formatting to enhance the overall effect, scores assigned to boys' writing were higher than when using traditional scoring tools. In addition, the girls focused more on creativity and trying new things when the scoring criteria more explicitly encouraged them to do so.

Teachers who want to show students that they value the risk taking and creativity that are often associated with boys' learning styles might also consider the following questions when carrying out student-teacher conferences:

1. What does the student want readers to think/feel/learn?
2. What does the student want help with to achieve the desired purpose?
3. What parts does the student feel are going to be most interesting, humorous, exciting, etc. for readers? What parts could be worked on to make them more interesting, etc.?
4. How has/will the student use graphics, drawings, and formatting to enhance the overall effect that she/he wants to achieve?
5. What has the student tried that is new and/or challenging?
6. What has the student learned about writing through working on this piece?

Supporting boys to become better writers involves looking at both our teaching and assessment of student writing. There is a push and pull between encouraging typically masculine styles and, at the same time, opening up alternatives to those masculine styles so that boys and girls are not recreating stereotypes in their writing. There's also a push and pull in helping students to express themselves creatively and take risks, and at the same time, to develop writing skills such as organizing ideas and using writing conventions. These suggestions are offered in the spirit of teachers going back and forth between these competing needs, rather than steering a straight path toward one or the other.

Words from the field...

"Teachers are more collaborative. They see the big picture and work together to share from one year to the next."

St. Gregory Catholic School
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario



RESOURCES:

Items mentioned in Interim Progress Reports
June 2007

- Booth, David. (2005). *Story Drama: Creating Stories through Role Playing, Improvising, and Reading Aloud*. Markham, ON: Pembroke.
- Cooper, Damian. (2007). *Talk about Assessment: Strategies and Tools to Improve Learning*. Toronto, ON: Thomson Nelson.
- Costa, Arthur L. and Bena Kellick. (2004). *Assessment Strategies for Self-Directed Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. 2nd Ed., Portland, Maine: Stenhouse.
- Day, Jeni Pollack, Dixie Lee Spiegel, Janet McLellan and Valerie Brown. (2002). *Moving Forward with Literature Circles*: Scholastic.
- Earl, Lorna and Steven Katz. (2006). *Leading Schools in a Data-Rich World: Harnessing Data for School Improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Earl, Lorna M. (2003). *Assessment As Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximize Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Evans, K. S. (2001). *Literature Discussion Groups in the Intermediate Grades: Dilemmas and Possibilities*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Horne, Martha and Mary Ellen Giacobbe. (2007). *Talking, Drawing, Writing*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse.
- Hubbard, Ruth S. and Brenda Power. (2003). *The Art of Classroom Inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2003). *Think Literacy: Cross Curricular Approaches*. Government of Ontario.
- Morgan, Norah and Juliana Saxton. (2006). *Asking Better Questions*. 2nd Ed., Portland, Maine: Stenhouse.
- Sousa, David A. (2005). *How the Brain Learns to Read*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Wilhelm, J. D. (1996). "You Gotta be the Book": *Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Websites and other helpful resources:

As you develop your school improvement plans for writing, you might consult the article (very brief) in the url listed here:

http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/changingschools/9503NL_07_CS55_02_school_improvement_mistakes.pdf

<http://www.educ.msu.edu/reports/edresearch/2003/march3.htm>

Pearson, P. D., & N. K. Duke. (2002). Comprehension instruction in the primary grades. In C.C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 247-258). New York: Guilford.

