



Volume II, Issue 1

November 2006

## Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry

### Work Plan Support Booklet – November 2006

*"We have specifically outlined our next steps to enhance instructional activities to improve boys' achievement in reading. We are looking forward to our continued journey to develop teacher and school capacity in pursuit of closing the gender gap in reading."*

Joanne Harris, W. J. Watson P.S., York Region DSB

#### Introduction/Overview

Congratulations on the scope and the quality of your teacher inquiry work to date! By now, you should have received copies of the Progress Report, September 2006 and realized that so much commendable work has been accomplished. The report contains abundant ideas for acquiring resources, working in teams, collecting data, and using the strategies found in *Me Read? No Way!*

We were particularly impressed with the thought you have given to the transition plans for Year Two of the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry. School teams reported that they held lengthy meetings in June and would be meeting again in September to orient new school team members to their previous work, plan data collection strategies for incoming students, and develop action plans for 2006-2007.

*"Our teaching practices are changing as we set boys up for literacy success. We look forward to continued improvements with the next steps in our plans."*

Pam Graham, High Park P.S., Lambton-Kent DSB

We are also pleased to be working again this year to support you and the Teacher Inquiry work through a series of support booklets, another video, and a sharing and in-service session scheduled for January/February 2007. Activities related to your Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry will continue through the year and you will be asked to submit a second Progress Report in June 2007.

The following goals have been established for Year Two, 2006-2007, of the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry.

1. Deepen understanding of Teacher Inquiry with special emphasis on manageable data collection that includes both quantitative and qualitative data
2. Continue team collaboration
3. Focus on specific research-based teaching strategies
4. Link to additional strategies recommended by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and/or Student Success/Learning to 18 initiatives

Barbara Bodkin, Rose Dotten, and Micki Clemens, OISE/UT  
[teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca)

#### Inside This Issue

- Page 2 Looking Together at the Progress Report 2006
- Page 2 Developing the Work Plan for 2006-2007
- Page 3 Team Learning: Talking about your Thinking and Ideas
- Page 4 Some Tips for "Talking about Ideas"
- Page 5 January/February Regional Sessions: Where are we now with our Teacher Inquiry?
- Page 6 Data Collection
- Page 8 Differentiating Instruction
- Page 11 Resources



## Looking Together at the Progress Report 2006

Time passes quickly and by now each team should have copies of the Progress Report for 2006. As multiple copies of the report were sent to each team, it might be a useful activity for the team to review the strategies outlined in the report. A comprehensive listing at the end identifies each work plan title and lists the schools and districts involved. You may wish to connect with your colleagues in order to learn more and share ideas, or you may wish to connect through us at: [teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:teacherinquiry@oise.utoronto.ca)

## Developing the Work Plan for 2006-2007

Now is the time to prepare a timeline and work plan for your Teacher Inquiry for Boys' Literacy work for this year. It is important to chart your "next steps" and post them for easy reference for the months ahead. A simple chart indicating steps/events, timelines, person(s) responsible and resources/supports would suffice. Look back to our first Support Booklet, March 2006 for ideas. You may also access the Support Booklets online at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/>

You began this process last June. The following excerpts from Minto-Clifford's inquiry team's planning for '06- '07 are provided as an example of good planning.

We will:

- continue to build capacity in our school in order to continue to develop and implement a school-wide writing program;
- engage in common assessment marking and engage in teacher moderation by marking in grade teams to ensure our assessments are increasingly reliable;
- develop a cycle of reflecting on our data to determine what we are doing well and what needs improving; and
- give teachers conference time with students so they can give them specific oral and written feedback.



## Team Learning: Talking about your Thinking and Ideas

In 2006-2007, many teacher inquiry teams are welcoming new colleagues. Make it a priority to establish operating norms and then constantly revisit them.

As the year progresses, your team meetings will provide opportunities to discuss and interpret your data. One powerful group norm relates to talking about ideas. Action research requires discussions about data and hypotheses about how and why the data manifests itself as it does. Teacher inquiry is a cyclic process – meaningful ideas are brought forward, strategies are worked through in the classroom, and the resulting data is reflected upon in order to drive further action.

Expressing ideas within a group requires care and consideration. When thoughts and hypotheses are connected too closely to the person expressing them, team members can be challenged in separating *the person from the idea*. Ideas too closely aligned with individuals can block discussion as the group interacts with the ‘speaker’ as a person rather than the idea being expressed. In that case, group members tend to interact out of their feelings for, and the relationship with, the presenter or speaker. This can be particularly true if the speaker has a formal role or is considered to be a knowledgeable authority, such as a program consultant or a principal.

“Productive group work is driven by data, both qualitative and quantitative. Data about student learning, school climate, student satisfaction, parent satisfaction and the like are important, grounded ‘ideas’ to put on the table.”

*The Adaptive School: A Source Book for Developing Collaborative Groups*  
Garmston and Wellman, p. 44

“Collaborative work in schools requires data as well as impressions. In fact, important learnings are possible when data does or does not align with the impressions of the group members.”

*The Adaptive School: A Source Book for Developing Collaborative Groups*, Garmston and Wellman, p. 39





## Some tips for “ Talking about Ideas”

The stems below work well when you are introducing a topic or idea.

- Here is an idea for consideration...
- One possible reason for this finding about boys' literacy could be...
- Here is a thought about why these data appear this way...
- This is not advocacy, I am just thinking out loud...

Knowing when to take ideas **off the table** is also a special group strategy. Identifying that you, as presenter of the idea, are withdrawing the idea, can be very productive. A way to think about this is balancing **advocacy** with **inquiry**. The purpose of advocacy is to influence colleagues with the rationale behind our thinking. The purpose of inquiry is to examine an idea being put forward, in order to fully understand it. An understanding of both sides is critical in any team dialogue.

An overly persistent or powerfully stated idea runs the risk of inhibiting others on your team from raising their own and possibly opposing ideas. Presenting logic to support your thinking lies at the heart of team dialogue and requires both cognitive and emotional skills. Team reminders to practice 'talking about thinking' can be very helpful in moving the dialogue about your findings forward.

“Think broadly. Think deeply. Think about multiple perspectives. Action researchers internalize these messages throughout their data collection journey.”

Powerful Designs in  
Professional Learning,  
pg. 58 NSDC,  
Cathy Caro-Bruce.

Team learning starts with **dialogue** - the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and begin genuine **thinking together**. This process involves recognizing patterns of interaction in teams which can undermine collaboration.

The ideas in this section have been adapted from Peter Senge's article: "Give me a lever long enough...and single-handed I can move the world", in *The Jossey Bass Reader on Educational Leadership*, p. 9, Michael Fullan, Editor.

We are pleased that the Ministry has provided funds this year for regionally based in-service sessions.

In January/February 2007, representatives from your teams will be invited to attend a one day in-service

and sharing session. A representative from your District Office will also be invited. At this point, dates, times, and locations for the day are being determined. You will be notified as soon as possible about all logistics. Our day will be a working and sharing session when you can both identify and celebrate successes as well as raise issues whose resolution will help your future teacher inquiry work.

Collegial dialogue is a powerful learning strategy and time will be provided to relate stories about your journeys to date.

## January/February Regional Sessions: Where are we now with our Teacher Inquiry?

**What is working?**  
**What is worth celebrating?**  
**What needs more refinement?**  
**What can we do to help?**



## We ask that team representatives bring the following to the sessions:

- 1) One example of a process related to your team collaboration that has worked well for you.
- 2) A brief outline of a specific instructional strategy contained in *Me Read? No Way!*, which appears to be working. This strategy could also link to resources related to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, or Student Success/Learning to 18 and Success for All. Components to include:
  - a clear and succinct overview of the teaching or classroom assessment strategy;
  - an outline of how you used the strategy;
  - recommendations of how you might adapt it in the future; and
  - an insight that could be helpful to other teams.
- 3) A technique you are using to display or make sense of your inquiry data. Bring an artifact or pictures if possible.
- 4) A resource you have used which has been helpful in your work - this could be professional or classroom-based.

*The next Support Booklet will contain a template for your team to use to organize and record the above components.*







## Data Collection

As you begin your work for this second year of the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry, it will be extremely important for you to review what you have accomplished in terms of your data collection. What types of data have you collected about your students? Did you ensure that you had a balance of both quantitative and qualitative data to support your inquiry? Will you be using the same assessment instruments this year or will you expand your data collection? Will you be using data/information gathered from last year to continue to track some of your students? Will there be any additional data that you want to obtain from students, parents, and other teachers?

*"One thing researchers often discover is that they do not have a sense of what they should have collected at the start of the project until they are well into their research."*

Hubbard and Power, *The Art of Classroom Inquiry*, 2003, page 70.

Now is the time to work together with all members of your team to re-establish or re-design your assessment plan for this coming year to ensure that you gather all the appropriate and significant evidence you need to document improvements in your boys' literacy achievement. Engaging with one another in strategic planning and professional dialogue about best practices in literacy assessment for boys will enhance every aspect of your work.

### Collecting Data

Remember what you are trying to achieve with your Essential Question in this inquiry project and that you must use **BOTH qualitative and quantitative assessment methods**.

For **Quantitative Data**, think about the classroom assessments used in your school or those required by your board, including pre- and post assessments, standardized assessments and board assessments such as: Concepts About Print, DRA, PM Benchmarks, CASI, and EQAO tests.

For **Qualitative Data**, think about using a variety of strategies such as interviews, portfolios, surveys/questionnaires, observation records, and audio/video recordings.

For example:

*"Our advice with surveys, as well as interviews, is to view them like photographs, useful snapshots of a moment in time that must be pieced together with other data to get a true picture of what is happening in your classroom."*

Hubbard and Power, *The Art of Classroom Inquiry*, 2003 page 65.

Remember to refer back to the **Work Plan Support Booklet**, April 2006, Vol.1, Issue 2, page 7 to review ideas on Data Collection (pages 3-7). (View it online at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>)

This is also a time to review your note-making strategies as you gather observations on your students and their work in the classroom. Consider their response to the instructional strategies that you are using, their achievement, and their attitudes and dispositions towards literacy. Remember to review your own personal classroom **chronicle** — your record of the project — for insights into questions that you raised during your work last year and which may need to be modified this year in light of new diagnostic information about your students.

## Analyzing Data

Once you have gathered your initial data, the school team should meet to “interrogate” and analyze the data. At this stage, you are trying to determine whether the evidence truly supports your inquiry. Visual displays of data can make the imperceptible apparent and can turn confusion into clarity. Colour-coded displays of data help to foster group ownership and engagement. By visually displaying data, school team members can focus attention on particular goals, see patterns that are otherwise barely evident, and gain insights into early findings on student achievement. Here are two examples:

### *Data Wall:*

You can create colourful newsprint-sized graphs displaying the student results and post them on the “data wall”. Then record observations and inferences on additional pieces of newsprint that can be posted under the graphs. At this point, you can start to analyze the data and reflect on the related and current issues that might impact student learning. A key factor to consider when using Data Walls is the public nature of the display and the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Keeping it visible and always up-to-date, keeps you focused on the importance of the data that is being collected and draws attention to the changes that occur as you retest and plot student achievement data on an ongoing basis.

### *Matrix:*

On chart paper, try drawing up a matrix for sorting your data. Across the top of the paper, record each of the categories or themes that you have been researching; e.g., class work, homework, writing tasks, and personal conferences. Down the left side, you can place either individual sources of data (e.g., surveys, interviews, assessment scores) or data from individual students. Now post this matrix online or in a secure area if you are using student names. Privacy can be an issue. As each team member reads through the data findings, record any pieces of data that correspond to those themes in the appropriate space on the matrix. New themes or categories may emerge during this phase.

Once you have completed one of these “Go Visual” displays above (or one of your own choosing), you will have a visual representation of your data for further in-depth examination and scrutiny.

## Learning from the Data

What did the data show? What themes, patterns, and findings emerged? Were there any surprises? What areas seem to be the most challenging for your boys? Where are the gaps in student achievement? Was there coherence in the student results among the different forms of assessment such as classroom tests, commercial tests, EQAO results, and report card marks? If there are discrepancies, what might the reasons be?

What new actions will you, as teacher inquirers, take based on what was learned? What instructional focus is best to address the areas that need improvement? What specific strategies could be implemented or refined in your classrooms to assist the students? What are you doing for at-risk boys, for ELL learners, or those with Special Education needs? What are you doing for boys, approaching Level 2? What different strategies might be needed to achieve improvement goals?

Ensure that you take time to reflect about your work and your data findings and interpretations. What new questions do you now have?



## Differentiating Instruction

“In most classrooms, some students struggle with learning, others perform well beyond grade-level expectations, and the rest fit somewhere in between. Within each of these categories of students, individuals also learn in a variety of ways and have different interests. To meet the needs of a diverse student population, many teachers differentiate instruction.”

Carol Tomlinson, “Differentiation of Instruction”, *Eric Digest*, 2001.

As each of you involved in the Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry continues to address the needs of the boys and young men in your classrooms, the topic of differentiating instruction may be a fruitful one for your school inquiry team to investigate as part of your start-up collaborative learning and sharing for this current year. Differentiation of instruction complements a number of the strategies identified in *Me Read? No Way!*.

### WHAT?

Differentiated instruction is about using teaching strategies that respond to the individual student. When you differentiate instruction, you plan ahead of time to adjust for individual differences in the students’ background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, motivation, and needs.

Based on the concept that “one size does not fit all”, differentiated instruction is flexible and open to change. It’s also about taking risks and trying teaching strategies that you might otherwise have overlooked. It’s about managing instructional time in a way that meets the curriculum expectations and provides motivating, challenging, and meaningful experiences for students who, in this day and age, are socialized to receive and process information in a myriad of different ways.

In her book, *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom* (2003), Carol Tomlinson identifies four key elements of the curriculum, *Content, Process, Product, and Learning Environment*, that can be modified in response to the variation and diversity in students (readiness, interest, or learning profile) and that should be considered when differentiating instruction:

**Content** -What the teacher plans to teach and what the student needs to learn or how the student will access the information. Content differentiation can be achieved by: (1) using reading materials at varying readability levels; (2) putting text materials on tape; (3) presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means; and (4) meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners.

**Process** - How the teacher plans to teach and how the student makes sense of the information and skills of the lesson. Process differentiation can be achieved by: (1) using tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity; (2) providing interest centres that encourage students to explore aspects of the class topic of particular interest to them; (3) developing personal agendas (task lists written by the teacher, containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners); and (4) varying the length of time a student may take to complete a task to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.



**Product** - Planning for culminating projects that ask students to rehearse, apply, and extend what they have learned in a unit. Product differentiation can be achieved by: (1) giving students options to demonstrate their learning (e.g., create a puppet show, write a letter, or develop a mural with labels); (2) using rubrics that match and extend students' varied levels of skill; (3) allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products; and (4) encouraging students to create their own assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements.

**Learning Environment** - Creating a positive learning environment, that is, the way the classroom works and feels. Learning environment differentiation can be achieved by: (1) making sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction, as well as places that invite student collaboration; (2) outlining clear guidelines for independent work that match individual needs; (3) developing routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students; and (4) helping students understand that some learners need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly. (adapted from *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom* 2003, pages 2-6.)



**"Differentiated instruction is responsive teaching!"**

Carol Tomlinson, *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom*, 2003

## HOW?

There is no recipe for differentiation. Rather, it is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that values the individual and can be translated into classroom practice in many ways. Many teachers start differentiating instruction with small, organized changes. Here are just a few samples; use the ones that make sense for your students:

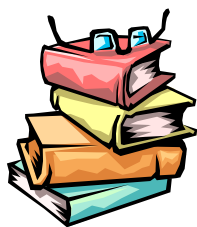
- Take notes on your students each day. Be conscious of what works and what doesn't work for different students.
- Assess students before you begin to teach a skill or topic. Study the results and their implications for you and your students.
- Look at all work your students do (discussions, journal entries, centres, products, quizzes, group tasks, homework) as indicators of student need, not marks in a grade book.
- Prepare students and parents for a differentiated classroom so that they are your partners. Be sure to talk often with students about the classroom — why it is the way it is, how it is working, and what everyone can do to help.
- Begin to change at a pace that pushes you a little bit beyond your comfort zone. You might begin with just one subject, just one time of the day, or just one curricular element (content, process, product, or learning environment). For example, try creating one differentiated lesson per

unit; differentiate one product per term or semester; try a differentiated task for only a small block of time.

- Find multiple resources for a couple of key parts of your curriculum.
- Establish class criteria for success, then work with students to add personal criteria to their lists.
- Give more choices about how to work, how to express learning, or which homework assignment to do.
- Remember to take time to reflect, to regain your energy, and to assess how things are going before you take the next step.

## Differentiating Instruction... Continued

From The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat,  
Differentiating Instruction, Webcast Resources, March 2006.



### 10 Quick and Easy Differentiation Strategies

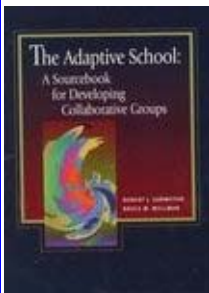


10	Adjust the pacing of instruction. Provide extra time to complete tasks.
9	Build in extra practice.
8	Provide auditory cues (e.g., routine instructions, transition music).
7	Provide visual cues (e.g., anchor charts, use of colour and font to highlight information).
6	Use graphic organizers to help students organize their thinking.
5	Build in movement (e.g., transitions, koosh balls, drama responses).
4	Group and regroup for different purposes.
3	Vary materials ... match texts to readers.
2	Provide <b>CHOICE</b> .
1	Start working as a team to identify the resources necessary to support all student needs.

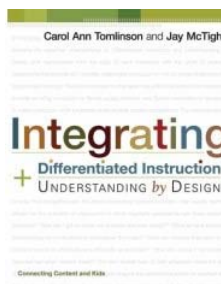
These are very exciting times for the teaching profession; we are faced with a generation of learners who are challenging us to think about how we deliver instruction. More and more teachers are determined to reach all these learners, to challenge students who may be identified as gifted as well as respond and support students who lag behind grade level. Teachers need to provide persistent invitations and opportunities for their students, investing time with those struggling students and helping each one to become as capable as possible. Differentiated instruction makes a difference!!!

## Resources

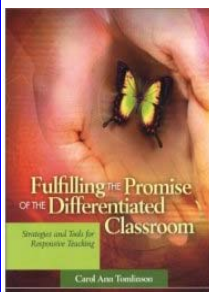
### Books



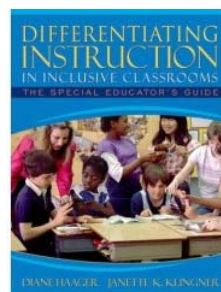
Garmston, Robert, and Bruce Wellman (1999). *The Adaptive School: A Source Book for Developing Collaborative Groups*. Norwood, MA: Christopher – Gordon



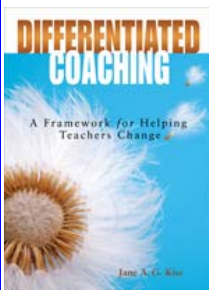
Tomlinson, Carol, and Jay McTighe (2006). *Integrating Differentiated Instruction & Understanding by Design (Connecting Content and Kids)*, Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development



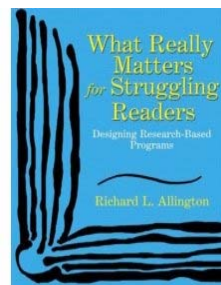
Tomlinson, Carol (2003). *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom: Strategies and Tools for Responsive Teaching*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development



Haager, Diane & Janette K. Klingner (2004). *Differentiating Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms: The Special Educator's Guide*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon



Kise, Jane A. G. (2006). *Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press



Allington, Richard (2006). *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-based Programs*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon

### On-Line Resources

#### Boys' Literacy

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/> The government website now contains the Support Booklets from the previous year. These are particularly helpful for new team members to review and as a point of reference for some of the strategies referred to in this Support Booklet. The site also contains the streaming video for the DVD on *Getting Started with Teacher Inquiry*.

#### Student Success/Learning to 18 and Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/studentsuccess.html>

The government website is useful for other Ministry resources from the Student Success/Learning to 18 initiatives and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Secondary teachers will find the Subject Specific Think Literacy documents of particular interest as they look for strategies specific to their curriculum areas.

Love, Nancy. (2004) "Taking Data to New Depths". *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2004 Vol. 25, No. 4

<http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/love254.pdf>

This article provides some solid background and useful strategies for collecting and analyzing data. Although the focus is mathematics and science, the information is equally relevant and useful for any teacher involved in the collection and analysis of data for improving student achievement.

**This booklet has been developed with financial support from the Ontario Ministry of Education.**