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REFEREED ARTICLES

Alternative High School Programming: Planning for Student Success

Doreen Prazak

Abstract

Alternative high school programs can be another educational option for students who wish to remain in school but whose needs can not be addressed in regular school classes. There are three elements to a successful program: the students, specific school components, and staff. At-risk indicators help to identify the students. A low student-to-teacher ratio helps to build not only positive personal relationships but also working relationships when inquiry-based learning is used. Technology and hands-on work projects engage students. Extended support staff and outside agencies support students' social-emotional well-being. These combined elements support at-risk students in their journey toward high school graduation.

Alternative high school programs offer at-risk students the opportunity to be successful academically. An alternative school program is “a public . . . secondary school that addresses [the] needs of students that typically can not be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education” (Franklin et al., 2007, p. 134). Three elements are essential to a successful alternative high school program. An alternative school serves at-risk students. Its environment includes a number of components that support these students' academic growth. The staff of an alternative program believes in building personalized relationships with students and providing both academic and social/emotional support. The correct combination of students, school components, and staff can lead to a successful alternative program.

An alternative program is designed for students who are at risk of dropping out. Indicators of at-risk students include course performance (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement [CCSRI], 2008), attendance (Heppen & Therriault, 2008), at-risk behaviours (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009), and social-emotional difficulties (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). Two course performance factors strongly predict which students are most likely to drop out of high school: failure in core courses and the number of credits earned in the first year of high school (CCSRI, 2008). If a student fails more than one core course and earns less than eight out of ten credits, he or she would be considered at risk. Course performance is a strong indicator of whether a student is at risk.

Students whose attendance is significantly low are most at risk. Studies have found that attendance, academic achievement, and graduation are directly correlated (Heppen & Therriault, 2008, p. 2). My experience concurs with this evidence. Students can struggle due to lack of attendance or, conversely, lack of attendance can indicate academic struggle. Academic improvement occurs when students are required to let the teacher know that they are not attending that day, and give the reason why. If a teacher does not hear from a student, then the teacher phones the student. The student is then aware that he or she is expected to be there and is missed. It is a primary goal of an alternative program to increase students' attendance, thereby giving the students a better chance at academic success.

At-risk behaviour can also be an indicator that alternative programming is needed. Students contribute to their academic demise by not adhering to the school discipline policy and by making irresponsible decisions (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). Sexual activity, violence, and drug, tobacco, and alcohol use are examples of irresponsible behaviour (Barr & Parrett, 2003). These

behaviours can lead to negative consequences such as suspension from school. When a student is suspended, an existing attendance problem is exacerbated, weakening the student's sense of self-worth and sense of belonging to the school. At-risk behaviours indicate a possible need for students to be removed from the general education program.

Social-emotional difficulties also contribute to students' decisions to drop out. Students who are experiencing social alienation and a general lack of caring from peers and educators do not feel that they belong to the school (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). These students do not participate in school activities. Moreover, students who have experienced a stressful event such as the death of a parent, family divorce, or bullying find it difficult to concentrate or do schoolwork (Barr & Parrett, 2003). When social-emotional difficulties such as these affect students' self-esteem, attitude toward education, and attendance, they indicate a potential dropout risk.

Many possible indicators can identify at-risk students. Any student can be at risk, but the typical profile of at-risk students is that they come from "low socioeconomic homes, [and/or] live in poverty with a single parent, grandparent or foster parent" (Barr & Parrett, 2003, p. 39). However, poor course performance, a low attendance rate, risky behaviours, and social-emotional difficulties are also prime indicators of at-risk students. It is important to realize that any students, at any time of their educational careers, can exhibit one or more of these indicators. Dropping out of school is more likely to happen if any of these indicators are present in the students' first year of high school (Heppen & Therriault, 2008). The challenge for high schools is to use these indicators to identify at-risk students and to provide them with personal and academic success in an alternative program.

There are a number of integral components in a well-developed alternative high school program. These include low enrolment (Barr & Parrett, 2003), caring educators (Dynarski et al., 2008), and an inquiry-based curriculum that includes technology (Duran, 2002) and work-related topics (Stone & Castellano, 2002). In a larger school setting, students "can become alienated and uninterested to the point where they feel little attachment to school and drop out" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30). Lower enrolment can mean fewer incidents of violence and lower dropout rates (Franklin et al., 2007, p. 134). When an alternative program has a smaller student-to-teacher ratio, it can provide a unique curriculum specifically tailored to the needs of the students (Barr & Parrett, 2003). A smaller student body is more likely to increase student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates, and to provide a more positive school climate (Dynarski et al., 2008). Educators have more opportunities to assist and build relationships with students when the class size is small. They can learn what motivates their students and use that knowledge to provide activities that increase student engagement.

Caring educators build positive relationships with their students. The National Research Council in the United States, after reviewing research on school programs which reduced dropout rates, concluded that the "evidence suggests that student engagement and learning are fostered by a school climate characterized by an ethic of caring and supportive relationships, respect, fairness, and trust" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30). A caring, supportive teacher gives appropriate, meaningful praise to build up students' confidence. He or she gently encourages students to work toward improvement. When the student-teacher relationship is built on respect, fairness, and trust, students are more likely to take risks. They know that even if they fail, the teacher will support and guide them. Personal, supportive attention has a more positive effect on students' achievement and motivation than teacher instructional expertise (Ward et al., 2009). Caring educators provide the support that at-risk students need to be successful.

Inquiry-based learning engages students in their learning. For students to experience "21st century success," inquiry-based learning enables students to learn relevant content and skills ("Buck Institute," 2010, para. 1). This style of learning is educationally sound, as its requirements are the use of social skills, specific outcomes, and assessment as, of, and for learning (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Students can work on projects that interest them, independently or in groups. The students are the gatherers of knowledge; the teachers are the facilitators.

Students have the opportunity to “express their learning in their own voice” (“Buck Institute,” 2010, para. 6). This autonomy from the typical teacher-centered style of learning helps to increase students’ engagement in the learning process because they are given the choice as to how and what they will learn. At-risk students can see the relevance and application of their learning to life beyond the school setting when learning is project based (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Thus, students’ engagement in learning increases when inquiry-based learning fosters real-life, outside-of-school experiences. An inquiry-based curriculum makes learning relevant and meaningful to the students.

Technology is central in students’ lives and can be used to deliver a positive, inquiry-based learning experience to at-risk students. Technology plays an integral role in inquiry-based learning (Waxman et al., 2002). Inquiry-based learning that uses technology can restructure learning (Duran, 2002, p. 217). It can connect at-risk students with other students from near and far, building a community of learners within and outside of the school building that is supportive and collaborative. Some additional positive results from technology use include a positive increase in students’ self-concept, attitude about learning, and achievement (Ward et al., 2009). Technologies that are central to students’ lives are wonderful resources and tools for learning. Technology helps to awaken curiosity, deepen learning, and provide a positive learning experience.

Inquiry-based learning infused with work-related topics can bring relevancy to student learning. Topics should be rigorous and have real-world applications structured around work and careers (Stone & Castellano, 2002). Research has shown that students who have vocational education, which includes work readiness and employment experience, appear to have a better success rate at obtaining and keeping a job (Foley & Pang, 2006). An alternative program can provide job-related workshops on topics such as resume writing, job interview skills, and interpersonal skills. If vocational programs are available, at-risk students in an alternative program should be encouraged and given the opportunity to participate (Foley & Pang, 2006). Work-based learning opportunities increase authentic learning and student engagement.

An alternative program should include a low student-to-teacher ratio, caring educators, and inquiry-based learning infused with technology and work related topics. Such a program can help students to reach goals that are “recognized and valued beyond the school” (Stone & Castellano, 2002, p. 265). These opportunities may include, but are not limited to, mentoring, contextual learning, job-shadowing, and community-centered activities (Sanders et al., 2002). Teachers who are committed to educating at-risk students provide not only academic support and guidance, but opportunities that make learning relevant.

Along with academic support and guidance, an alternative program should include social and emotional support for at-risk students. A school needs to feel like “a surrogate family”; “it is a place where students feel safe, cared for, and challenged” (Barr & Parrett, 2003, p. 184). An alternative program should provide an opportunity for students to deal with their emotional issues. Providing a caring, supportive environment builds at-risk students’ sense of belonging and resiliency to dropping out (McMahon, 2007). The alternative program should include staff members who believe in building relationships with students (Dynarski et al., 2008) and community services (Foley & Pang, 2006). These two elements can provide the social and emotional support needed by at-risk students.

The staff of an alternative program should have certain characteristics. It is important that the staff members include a teacher, educational assistant, resource teacher, guidance counsellor, and social worker (Dynarski et al., 2008). The latter two staff members provide the expertise in helping students to deal with their social and emotional issues. All staff members need to value all students (McMahon, 2007), extol an “an all-for-one, one-for-all camaraderie amongst each other, students, [and] parents” (Barr & Parrett, 2003, p. 184), and be willing to develop longer term relationships with students (Dynarski et al., 2008). These staff traits can help students to feel that they belong and are welcomed and valued in the program (Waxman et

al., 2002). A positive and supportive atmosphere has been proven to improve students' attitudes toward learning, thereby improving attendance and academic achievement (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Staff characteristics are the cornerstone to an effective at-risk program.

Community services can also provide valuable services to students who attend alternative schools (Foley & Pang, 2006). Creating a Future is an example of a supportive service that helps students to be successful in school and in the workforce. This agency helps students to identify strengths, develop interpersonal skills, explore job opportunities, compile a resume with cover letter, and hone job interview skills. Developing these skills builds students' social competency, supports resiliency, and provides a sense of purpose for the future (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Students who are struggling with addictions may also benefit from special programming designed to help them overcome and deal with drug and/or alcohol abuse. In this way, outside agencies play a supportive role in the students' lives.

There are many benefits to providing a supportive student environment. Students' risky behaviours and truancy are reduced, and their grades and social skills are improved (Dynarski et al., 2008). If students know that they are supported by the staff, they have a more positive outlook toward school and peers, feel more attached to the school, and are more involved in school life (Waxman et al., 2002). Outside agencies can offer additional job-related and emotional support. An alternative program that offers the appropriate human resources for at-risk students also provides the social-emotional support that at-risk students need.

An alternative program can deliver an education that meets the needs of at-risk students. In order for an alternative program to be successful, its student body must first be carefully identified using at-risk indicators. There should be a low student-to-teacher ratio. Caring educators who use an inquiry-based curriculum infused with technology and work-related topics will engage students and make learning relevant to them. The students' social-emotional well-being should also be considered and addressed through the use of extended support staff and outside agencies. A well-thought-out alternative program can be the second chance that at-risk students need to be successful in school, growing socially and emotionally, and ultimately graduating from high school.

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Empowerment and Motivation of Young Aboriginal Mathematics and Science Students in Canada

Nadia Binda-Moir and Amjad Malik

Abstract

This article addresses the issues faced by the young Aboriginal students in urban and rural settings, which hinder their achievement in mathematics and science. An effort is made to reveal the techniques and programs that address the under-representation of young Aboriginal students in these subjects at secondary and post-secondary levels. Successful programming is essential to bridge the gap between differing urban and rural cultures and also to make the content material recent and relevant, thus providing a supportive environment. The Aboriginal students can be empowered to learn and be motivated to succeed by improving the linkage between Western and Indigenous thinking, by creating relevant and up-to-date curricula, and by providing adequate support at the family and community level.

The population of young Aboriginal students is rapidly growing in Canada; however, the rates of achievement among these youth are grossly underrepresented in high schools and post-secondary education. These numbers are even more reduced in the subjects of mathematics and science. Though there are a growing number of young Aboriginals entering into urban areas and attending city high schools, there are still diminished numbers of students pursuing studies in mathematics and science (Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006). Empowerment and motivational skills are key tools that are taught to most students in hopes of their becoming successful members of society; these tools are even more crucial to those students from Aboriginal backgrounds. For the purposes of this paper, the term Aboriginal will be used to represent those students of Metis, Inuit, and First Nations heritage. This article provides a background of the key problems facing Aboriginal students in urban and rural settings; as well as outlining techniques for providing sound teachings in mathematics and science with the purpose of empowering and motivating young Aboriginal students.

Current Issues Facing Young Aboriginal Students

Though the Aboriginal population in Canada is growing rapidly, there is still a strong dissonance between the number of young Canadian Aboriginals and the number of young Canadian Aboriginals who are graduating. Statistics for the graduation rates of Aboriginal students in 2011 indicated that less than 50% of students were graduating from high school (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). This statistic was in stark contrast to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, where the graduation rates were as high as 88% (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). There are three main areas of concern regarding the education of young Aboriginal students specifically in the areas of math and science: contradictory ways of thinking between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, a lack of relevant course material, and the absence of proper support systems.

Drastic differences exist in the way that science is viewed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In this article, the term *Western* describes non-Aboriginal perspective of science and the term *Indigenous* describes the Aboriginal perspective. The Western approach tends to view science as an amalgamation of distinct subject areas, whereby the researcher acts as a separate entity quite removed from the subject matter of study (Hatcher et al., 2009). The overall aim of Western science puts an immense emphasis on finding definitive answers in an attempt to gain a certain level of power over nature (Aikenhead & Ogawa, 2007). Once this power is attained by the researcher, the so-called mysteries of the universe will be unlocked and a level of ultimate knowledge will be achieved.

Indigenous science tends to have a more holistic approach to learning, or coming to know. *Coming to know* is a term that is used to describe the way in which Indigenous science is understood by Indigenous peoples (Colorado, 1988). The Indigenous researcher is not seen as a removed specimen, but more as an active participant who is thoroughly connected to the environment and the subject area. Knowing is based more on the experiential journey taken by the learner rather than on empirical evidence (Hatcher et al., 2009). This journey focuses on the relationships and kinships found between living organisms; allowing the learners to engage their body, mind, and spirit (Cajete, 2000). Because there is such a great disparity between the Indigenous way of viewing science and the Western way of viewing science, many Aboriginal students feel a certain disconnect with the subject area because they cannot grasp the differences in the ways of learning. Western culture is not conducive to Indigenous teachings and some Aboriginal students have problems trying to change the way that they think (Hatcher et al., 2009). As a result of this disconnect between the two ways of viewing science, many Aboriginal students pull away from the sciences and choose not to pursue them in their later high school years or in university or college.

Another problem that plagues young Aboriginal students is the perceived lack of relevance of the subject matter. Because there have traditionally been low numbers of Aboriginal students enrolling in science and math courses (Tait, 1999), many youth have not had the exposure to the subject areas that their non-Aboriginal counterparts have had. The absence of contact between Aboriginal students and the science and math subjects may be due to their living in isolated communities or their having few to no family members involved in careers that utilize the subject areas. This lack of exposure has led to several generations of underachieving minorities in these subjects (Varghese, 2009).

A lack of culturally relevant classes can also be linked to the differences between Indigenous and Western peoples' personal circumstances. Generally speaking, the home life of Aboriginal students is not the same as non-Aboriginal students in such factors as family structure, family occupation, community location and structure (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). The result of these differences between home environments and school environments is the offering of a science and math curricula that has the impression of an entirely foreign culture (Aikenhead, 1996), a culture to which Aboriginals have no real connections (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). Because Aboriginal youth do not have a significant connection to the sciences and math, they have low registration numbers in these areas in both high school and post-secondary education, leading to an overall disengagement from the subject areas.

The final issue that hinders the success of Aboriginal youth in the areas of science and mathematics is the lack of proper supports at the family and community level, which would include people in leadership roles. For those students living in relatively isolated communities, such as those in northern Manitoba, there is a scarcity of qualified support staff. Often, the only person qualified to help a student is the teacher, and quite frequently this teacher does not have adequate training in the areas of science or math (Professor Lindsay, personal communication, July 5, 2011). If in addition the student has a poor relationship with the teacher, he/she can be left feeling discouraged with the subject area and not want to resolve his or her negative experiences. As a result, the student could abstain from taking science and math courses in the future.

Traditionally, Aboriginal people have utilized techniques such as sharing circles, ceremonies, mediation, and storytelling as their chief means of interacting and communicating (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). These techniques of communication are usually facilitated by Elders in the community (Spence et al., 2007). It is a rare occurrence to see any of these methods of learning being used in today's Western classrooms. A lack of leadership, due to the ineffective use of Elders in teaching and learning, can lead to students' not having proper guidance in school, which can lead to floundering in their studies and a total disengagement from science and math. The shortage of adults with post-secondary education in predominantly Aboriginal communities significantly affects the graduation rates of Aboriginal youth (Spence et

al., 2007). Educational attainment declines when there are limited numbers of adults in proper educational leadership roles in the family or community; educational success further suffers when support from these people is lacking.

Practices Required to Build Motivational Skills and Empower Young Aboriginal Students

On a whole, it can be said that the levels of high school completion amongst Aboriginal youth are lagging behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Belczewski, 2009); however, certain practices can be implemented to thwart these issues and promote success. Throughout the country, several studies have been carried out that provide valuable information regarding the success of Aboriginal youth (for example, see Baydala et al., 2009; Houser & Bainbridge Frymier, 2009; Spence et al., 2007). There are also hidden pockets throughout the country where young Aboriginal students are thriving in their studies. These successful programs provide valuable information about what is required to empower and motivate Aboriginal youth. Three main areas need to be addressed in order to provide successful programming that empowers and motivates Aboriginal students: (1) creating border crossings between Western thinking and Indigenous thinking, (2) creating relevant and modern curricula, and (3) providing adequate support at the family and community level.

There are blatant differences in the way science and math are viewed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; however, these two different ways of thinking can be merged together to create a unified approach to “coming to know.” The Mi’kmaq people of Atlantic Canada have a tenet known as Two-Eyed Seeing. Two-Eyed Seeing allows a learner to view with one eye the strengths of the Indigenous ways of knowing and with the other eye the strengths of the Western way of knowing (Hatcher et al., 2009). By using Two-Eyed Seeing, the formation of an integrated curriculum can occur. This integrative curriculum can draw on aspects of both Indigenous learning and Western learning without either taking precedence over the other. Students who formerly struggled trying to adapt to a more Western mode of thought would have an easier time following a curriculum that more closely mirrors an integrated way of life between the two cultures.

One of the main reasons that Aboriginal students disengage from learning is due to the perceived irrelevance of the classroom curricula (Belczewski, 2009). This deficiency in relevance can be linked to the dissonance between school culture and home culture or a disinterest in the delivery method of curricula. Western type schools emphasize discussion and explanation (Varghese, 2009), which are not commonly used in Aboriginal culture.

One way to combat the stress caused by this discord, and at the same time demonstrate the relevancy of the curriculum, is to deliver the course materials by means of a more holistic approach – more specifically by using the Aboriginal model of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is a powerful and common symbol used in traditional Indigenous culture. Modelling and delivering courses via this framework will enable students to feel a certain kinship toward the material to be learned. A holistic approach can also tap into several of the multiple intelligences at one time (Hatcher et al., 2009). In Varghese’s (2009) broad frame for each of the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel, lessons can be divided into seeing, feeling, knowing, and doing. Creating this harmony will empower students to excel and gain self-confidence.

Another way to make material relevant is by using teaching strategies that students are familiar with. This includes methods such as Elders’ stories, sharing-circles, reflection, and the use of technology (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). Knowledge that is passed down through Elders can motivate students to connect with their past, present, and future (Hatcher et al., 2009). Even if the specific material is more Western in nature, using traditional techniques can draw a link between the old and the new, and make the information more relevant. Schools that offer culturally relevant teaching strategies are more likely to provide Aboriginal students with the tools that they need to succeed (Baydala et al., 2009). Like other youth, Aboriginal students

thrive on the use of technology. Teachers must tap into the students' interests by using modern forms of technology in their teaching (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). The use of holistic teaching strategies and the implementation of technology is a surefire way to engage students and make the material relevant.

The final strategy that can be used to motivate and empower Aboriginal youth can be considered the most important technique: educators and community members must provide a respectful environment that is supportive and conducive to learning. The foremost way to provide a supportive learning environment is by having teachers who are passionate and motivated themselves. Teacher characteristics have a significant effect on student motivation and achievement (Houser & Bainbridge Frymier, 2009). Teacher clarity is ranked amongst the highest criteria for influencing student empowerment. Their empowered students are more likely to be motivated to complete assigned tasks and have greater self-esteem. Effective teachers must also navigate the bridge between Western and Indigenous science (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). This compassion for both ways of learning can provide the support that students need to be successful.

Another way to provide support is by developing a community of caring. Results from studies carried out by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the Saskatchewan Department of Education show that communities that participate in activities that support schools are a key factor in promoting education attainment in youngsters (Spence et al., 2007). In several programs throughout Canada and the world, having community involvement has greatly inspired and motivated students (for example, see Aldous et al., 2008; Belczewski, 2009; Hatcher et al., 2009). One such summer-school program was offered to Aboriginal science students in Australia and the results were groundbreaking. Students significantly improved in their studies and in their behaviour and attitudes. In another program offered to the students of the University of New Brunswick First Nations Science Outreach Program, university students hosted a science camp within the Aboriginal community. The purpose of this program was to build relationships between educators and youth, and within the community itself. Positive relationships help to motivate and empower students by providing a supportive community (Baydala et al., 2009; Belczewski, 2009).

A final way to motivate and empower students is to surround them with inspiring and educated adults. Adults who value education can offer leadership and guidance to young students, with resultant positive effects on their motivation and future success (Spence et al., 2007). Encircling students with educated, supportive adults provides an environment that nurtures education and empowers students to succeed.

Conclusion

The growing populations of Aboriginal youth have not accompanied commensurate increases in high school completion rates. Strides have been made to address the low levels of high school graduates; however, many of these developments have not had much success. Problems such as the differences between student culture and school culture, a perceived lack of relevance of course material, and the absence of support from community and family members, trouble today's Aboriginal youth. These issues can be addressed by bridging the gap between the two differing cultures, making material modern and relevant, and providing a supportive environment filled with educated adults. Once these issues are addressed, students will feel empowered to learn and motivated to succeed. Education will be theirs for the taking.

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Shared Leadership: A Shift in Thinking

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Abstract

In a time when educators are questioning whether they have the energy to embark on a leadership journey, a different way of thinking about leadership is needed. Shared leadership demonstrates a shift in thinking. Shared leadership leads schools and divisions to function with multiple leaders by accessing, at differing times, individual strengths and talents. Although definite barriers to this model exist, a level of synergy can be experienced when shared leadership is successfully implemented. By investigating this new approach, we may improve our ability to attract educational leaders.

The definition of *leadership*, a term that has existed in education for years, has evolved and changed as society has, and leaders have evolved to rise and meet societal expectations. The role of educational leader has become more complex, demanding, and stressful. This challenging role lacks appeal for many educators and, as a result, educational leadership is once again being re-examined. Shared leadership has surfaced with the potential to broaden our perspective beyond the current practice of one leader and several followers. The days of one-person leadership are over, as it leaves the talents of teachers relatively untouched and school improvement relatively unstable (Lambert, 2002). Shared leadership has distinctive characteristics, specific roles for principals and teachers, advantages, and definite barriers, all of which need to be examined if school principals wish to implement shared leadership as their practice.

As much as educators have tried, they have failed to establish a model of shared leadership that can be spread across many different schools (Lindahl, 2008). Leadership today needs to initiate strategies for encouraging leadership from all members of a school community, regardless of their position (Frost, 2008). A roadblock is the lack of differentiation between the concepts of leadership and administration. Leadership involves leading people, whereas administration involves managing things (Lindahl, 2008). Shared leadership offers the opportunity to lead people in more ways than simply sharing administrative duties that teachers see as unsatisfying. It takes teachers beyond their classroom doors and transfers leadership roles from an individual to a school. In shared leadership, individuals are committed to improved student learning through participatory decision-making (Margolis, 2008). In order to be sustainable, shared leadership is not to be looked at as another practice, but rather a new way of conceptualizing current leadership.

At first glance, some may view shared leadership as another form of teacher collaboration. Shared leadership, however, is more than just collaboration, as it focuses on the results from an activity and not on the label given to the activity (Harris, 2004). For example, a study group of high school math teachers collaborate, ask reflective questions, and challenge their teaching practices in grade nine mathematics. As a result, new lessons are developed and the scores of the students improve. Shared leadership is identified as the result of the action, the increased scores, not the practice of the study group (Spillane, 2009). Shared leadership is concerned with professional knowledge, but is more concerned with teachers' roles in the creation of that knowledge, and in its transfer to other educators and students alike (Frost, 2008). The core of shared leadership involves educators being responsible for the learning of their colleagues, more than collaborating with each other.

Shared leadership has been identified as a practice of collective leadership, wherein teachers develop expertise by working together. Shared leadership focuses on engaging expertise wherever it exists within an organization, rather than looking only to the people holding formal positions (Harris, 2004). The breadth of participation does not automatically result in an

increased level of student achievement. It is not a scenario that has everyone in the school sharing responsibility for leading. Shared leadership involves all individuals leading, at one time or another, when their level of expertise is required. Shared leadership occurs when ownership is encouraged, sharing occurs, and learning is essential (Doyle & Smith, 2009). In summary, shared leadership involves spreading the leadership function among many people, thereby accomplishing tasks through the interactions of multiple leaders.

The principal has been the sole leader in schools for decades. Only if a school warranted a vice principal would there be shared leadership. In contrast, within a model of shared leadership, the principal must be prepared “to relinquish power to others” (Harris, 2005, p. 260). The ability to share leadership power rests in the principal’s belief that engaging in shared leadership will result in sustainable school improvement. The principal must believe that teacher leaders, not just the principal, are also the drivers of change and catalysts for important work (Harris & Townsend, 2007). There is no pay scale built in for teachers; therefore, the principal needs to encourage teacher leaders and then be creative in how teacher innovation will be rewarded. A principal engaged in shared leadership must bear in mind the learners’ views, but at the same time challenge them (Lambert, 2003). Shared leadership involves questioning the actions of teachers through reflective inquiry and dialogue. It is imperative that, prior to engaging in this type of activity, a principal builds trust among colleagues, fosters self-esteem in teachers, enhances personal professional competence, and gives staff responsibilities beyond those of teaching (Harris, 2004). Only when collegiality has been built can sharing leadership flourish among those beyond the office doors.

In shared leadership, it is a priority that the school principal be the primary person to articulate the vision so that staff members work towards a common goal. The principal, while working with members of the school community, must construct the shared vision (Lambert, 2002). This vision development is done by facilitating conversations, by keeping the focus on student learning, by modeling collaboration, and by posing questions that facilitate reflective dialogue. The early stages of shared leadership will require that the principal supports the teachers emotionally and guide them to embrace this new way of working together (Margolis, 2008). Research indicates that successful leaders are those who lead both the cognitive and affective lives of the school by developing clear goals, by building alliances, and by improving teachers professional development (Harris, 2004). These are gradual changes in principal leadership, which take time and work to achieve. Positive promotion and encouragement of shared leadership are conducive to a mutual understanding of the role of the principal.

The success of shared leadership also relies on building leadership capacity in teachers. For leadership capacity to increase, teachers must believe that all members of the faculty have unique information to share, and be willing to contribute enthusiastically (Maznevski, 1994). During reflective conversations, when current teaching practice is being challenged, teachers must have both high morale and a tolerance for conflict while working towards the betterment of student learning. Professional development should be led by inspiring leaders, as they are able to make theory come alive in practice. They can show current examples of student work, and they know the reality of how things work in the classroom (Margolis, 2008). Teachers have classroom credibility for offering professional development to their colleagues, which the principal lacks. Although the principal articulates the vision, it is the teachers who assist in developing it, by bringing it to life in their classrooms and by providing ongoing assessment throughout its implementation (Lindahl, 2008). Teachers are growing and contributing to shared leadership when they increase their involvement in school-based decision making, improve student learning, organize and lead in-services, and mentor other teachers.

Several positive factors are associated with leading through a shared leadership model. Once effectively introduced, a school under shared leadership has lower resistance to change, more teacher control over the work place, greater self-efficacy, and greater readiness to promote the common school goals (Addi-Raccah, 2009). Schools are often places where teachers work in isolation, with little conversation about the happenings in their classrooms.

Teachers who believe that their school is led by a cooperative leadership team, characterized by group cohesion, are more committed to working together towards their school goals (Hulpia et al., 2010). In a shared leadership model, teachers who believe they have a voice in decision making also feel more connected to their administrator, and less professional apathy (Heller, 1993).

The greatest benefit of shared leadership in education is the likely improvement of student outcomes, as teachers become empowered in areas of importance to them (Harris, 2004). This improvement occurs as a result of teachers' listening and contributing as a collaborative group. The actions are spearheaded because of the rightness of what is being said. As leadership capacity grows, so does the importance of student leadership in the school, which leads to greater student achievement. Once that leadership capacity in a school has been built, a point may come when there is a willingness to lead without a principal (Lambert, 2006). Other positive side-effects in schools that lead through shared leadership are the increased level of teacher confidence, built-in professional development through collaboration, and less vulnerability to organizational change. These benefits encourage the teachers to continually reflect on their teaching practice in order to enhance student learning.

Shared leadership, however, is not without barriers. Changing tradition always comes with struggle. Educational leadership has traditional hierarchies with positions and pay scales that are not instantly responsive to a more fluid approach. There are inherent threats to status as well as to the status quo (Harris, 2005). A principal may feel vulnerable and experience a loss of control after distributing leadership tasks. If shared leadership is misconstrued as delegation, it will not work, so a principal must think carefully about what tasks will be selected and to whom they will be delegated. Teacher relationships may be affected, as teacher leaders may feel disrespected and disregarded. Others may become resentful as significant challenges to teaching practice take place (Timperley, 2005). In the early stages, shared leadership may involve smaller groups of leaders who come across as trying to represent the whole and, as a result, skepticism may creep into the thoughts of those not involved (Kirby et al., 1992). A major pitfall to shared leadership is the time that it takes to involve more teachers. Dedicated time to ensure that reflective conversations occur is difficult to find. For success to be encountered, shared leadership has implications that must be overcome.

There are a few specific ideas for a principal to consider when implementing shared leadership. Principals need to begin by involving others in some shared decision making with regards to budget and policy items in the school (Harris, 2004). They should look for teachers who naturally build skills and confidence in others, nurture a culture of success, and have follow through. Selected teachers could be allocated important tasks and leadership responsibilities rotated among them, possibly through study groups, vertical learning communities, or leadership teams. There are three ways to view shared leadership implementation: division of labor, whereby jobs are split to achieve a goal; co-performance, whereby individuals work together to achieve a goal; and parallel performance, whereby colleagues work alongside each other to achieve a goal (Lindahl, 2008). Each method is chosen based on the needs of the school, and more than one arrangement may occur at any given time. Factors to consider when determining which arrangement may work in a school include the school culture and setting, and staff ages, motivation, morale, and turnover. Shared leadership should not be implemented when many other initiatives are underway, as it requires a significant amount of dedicated energy (Kirby et al., 1992). Careful consideration is important when implementing shared leadership, in order to see its full benefit.

Research on shared leadership, and on its effect on student learning, is relatively sparse. More research is needed into approaches, models, and forms of practice wherein shared leadership can flourish (Harris, 2005). It is important that school leaders work at developing a support group of critical friends to assist in the maintenance of energy, and to maintain enthusiasm throughout the implementation. Although a shared leadership model may be effective in rural schools with small staff numbers, little research has been done in that venue. A

beginning step to working towards shared leadership is to educate staff on what good conversation is, in order to develop “ways of being” in communication, including silence, which allows action answers to surface (Doyle & Smith, 2009, para. 34). Shared leadership is an emerging concept that needs to continue to evolve, with research coming from schools currently engaged in its practice.

Shared leadership is not easy, nor is it prescribed. It takes courage and work on a daily basis, but in the end it is very rewarding. Leadership is the professional work of everyone in a school, and shared leadership is the vehicle to building a culture wherein all members of an organization are expected to lead at an appropriate point. When people work efficiently together in authentic relationships, focused on a shared purpose, they create synergy (Lambert, 2003). Synergy regenerates people instead of draining them. Synergy arises from conversations that are collegial in nature and in the resulting actions. Educational leaders today are in highly stressful and demanding positions, and are looking for renewed energy. The notion of shared leadership suggests that principals think differently about their leadership. It suggests that they extend the leadership function over multiple people, in order to create synergy to build sustainable school improvement and to empower others. Shared leadership demonstrates a shift in thinking about leadership, which ultimately makes a principal’s position more appealing and effective.

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Supporting English Language Learners with Reading Recovery

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Abstract

English language learners (ELLs) need to build competency with the English language quickly, in order to benefit from classroom instruction. Reading Recovery offers theoretical underpinnings which support accelerated language acquisition with valuable applications in a classroom setting. Teachers need to develop language as a meaningful whole, making connections between speaking, reading, and writing. By carefully observing a child's use of language, teachers can design instruction to build on the child's current language strengths. Learning a new language is complex and teachers must support ELLs by providing explicit teaching and massive opportunities to practise speaking, reading, and writing.

Learning to speak, read, and write are complex tasks. In the school setting, language develops through reading, writing, and speaking. During Reading Recovery lessons, most English Language Learners (ELLs) make excellent progress in speaking, reading, and writing (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2007). Understanding the value of the speaking, reading, and writing connection in instruction would better support ELLs in early years classrooms. Reading Recovery procedures develop language as a whole, with explicit connections between reading, writing, and speaking. The theories of emergent literacy, working with whole texts, teaching from the known, and developing language through speaking, reading, and writing would assist ELLs in a classroom setting. ELLs need to be supported in learning and practicing complex literacy tasks.

Emergent Literacy

Language learning does not begin when students enter school. Children learn language from the time they are born and begin noticing the world around them. Whether children enter school with English as a first or an additional language, they have experiences on which to construct new learning (Clay, 2005a). Children have learned that language is a social tool for receiving and sending messages (Halliday, 1994). ELLs have learned spoken language in their mother tongue and have an innate understanding that language is used to communicate.

ELLs come from cultural backgrounds that are likely different from that of the teacher. The more a teacher understands about the home culture and the social groups important to the child, the easier it is to build on language experiences (Wilson, 2001). When teachers make connections between home and school, ELLs are better supported (Chen et al., 2008). In fact, the function of language at both home and school is “to communicate, to understand, and be understood” (Cazden, 1988, p. 76). When teachers make an effort to understand students’ home cultures and prior experiences with language, students are better supported in the classroom setting.

Working with Whole Texts

Speaking, reading, and writing are means of delivering or receiving an informative message (Halliday, 1994). When working with ELLs, it might be tempting to teach small components of information in isolation, but the concepts of purpose and message will be lost. Without drawing on prior understandings of language as a means of communication, students lose “motivation to use such forms in personally meaningful situations” (Jones, 2011, p. 12). As a result, language development slows and students will be reluctant to speak, read, and write.

The Reading Recovery lesson is supported by a framework of work, with whole texts intertwining speaking, reading, and writing. Lessons are built on a framework of whole stories or

messages. In every lesson, children read four or five whole books, talk about books, tell their own stories, and write a story. The teacher supports children's use of what they know in reading to help with writing, and what they know in writing to help with reading. Talking, reading, and writing improve when teachers "strengthen children's control over the structures of the language they use" (Clay, 2004, p. 1). A foundation of using whole texts in speaking, reading, and writing promotes understanding of language.

Determining a Child's Control of Language

Teachers need to understand the ELLs' ability to use language in speaking, reading, and writing before they can begin teaching (Manitoba Education, 2011). Reading Recovery teachers use tools and procedures to observe students control of language in reading, writing, and speaking (Kelly, 2009). Classroom teachers might consider gathering evidence of what students can do in one or more of the following ways: the Record of Oral Language task (Clay et al., 2007), the Biks and Gutches task (Clay, 2007), running records of text reading, writing samples, and recording longest utterances. Teachers need to know what each ELL controls, and this knowledge supports further instruction (Alberta Education, 2009).

The Record of Oral Language task is delivered in a one-on-one setting with the child repeating sentences after the teacher. The sentences are graded for difficulty according to language structures. Students requiring additional language experiences can be identified (Clay et al., 2007). The task also indicates which language structures the child uses correctly, or in other words "controls," in speech (Rodriguez-Eagle & Torres-Elias, 2009, p. 56).

The Biks and Gutches task prompts the child to answer to fill in the blanks by predicting what word comes next in the story. The responses are analyzed to see which inflections or word endings the child controls (Clay, 2007). Understanding the inflections a child controls can help the teacher to understand how to support a child to hear, speak, read, and write words with complex endings.

Running records of text reading provide evidence of language that the child controls. The teacher notices vocabulary and structures that are difficult and uses this information to support the learner in continued book reading (Clay, 2002). The running record also indicates whether the book is easy, instructional, or hard. Each child needs practice in reading books that are easy and can be read successfully (Clay, 2005b).

Writing samples collected on a regular basis provide evidence of language learning (Clay, 2005b). Writing is speech recorded in written form. For ELLs, teachers can note changes in sentence construction, tense usage, and clarity of message.

The classroom teacher might keep records of longest utterances produced by ELLs in the regular classroom setting (Clay, 2005a). This record provides evidence of the language structures children control and if noted by the teacher on a regular basis, evidence of growth over time.

Reading Recovery teachers are careful observers of student behaviours; classroom teachers also need to be keen observers of ELLs, in order to provide instruction built on students' language capabilities. Tools can be used to support observation of students' language competencies. The classroom teacher must have a way of observing and recording what ELLs can do, in order to determine what needs to be taught.

Explicit Instruction Is Critical

Explicit instruction and high expectations are important for ELLs. Without quality instruction, the risk of ELLs dropping out of school is high (Fien et al., 2011). Teachers can not instruct ELLs as they would instruct children whose first language is English. Teaching ELLs requires specific consideration of "vocabulary and comprehension instruction, academic language

instruction, increased practice opportunities through small-group instruction, and peer-assisted learning” (Fien et al., 2011, p. 149). ELLs have literacy needs that must be addressed.

Massive Opportunities for Speaking, Reading, and Writing

Improving language competency requires practice. ELLs require massive amounts of practice with speaking, reading, and writing (Manitoba Education, 2011). It is important to remember that English is a complex language, children make grammatical mistakes, and teachers need to work at understanding the child’s message, not correcting speech errors (Rodriguez-Eagle & Torres-Elias, 2009). ELLs may also speak with “the phonology and intonation patterns of their primary language” (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009, p. 441). Teachers must work to understand their message and not attempt to correct these differences. ELLs must engage in conversations (Rodriguez-Eagle, 2009), and teachers must plan to provide opportunities for talking. Through continued practice using language, children will learn the rules of how English sounds and how words are put together to make sense (Jones, 2011).

Language Learning in the Classroom

To support ELLs in the classroom, teachers need to consider the language structures that the students currently control. Teachers need to get ELLs to practise new language structures in ways which link speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers need to “get the new phrase or sentence: to the ear (listening), to the mouth (saying), to the eye (reading), and to the written product (creating text)” (Clay, 2004, p. 5). Using one or more of the assessment tools previously mentioned, teachers are ready to make effective teaching decisions.

Speaking Opportunities in the Classroom

ELLs need opportunities to speak in the classroom. Engaging in conversation is oral language instruction that extends vocabulary and grammatical skills (Bowyer-Crane et al., 2008). Students need opportunities to participate in meaningful conversations with more “expert” others: teachers, children with English as a first language, volunteers, or anyone whose English language proficiency is stronger than their own. Speaking and hearing language aids language development.

Genuine conversation needs to be guided by an expert. In Reading Recovery, the teacher engages the child in conversations about personal experiences and supports language development by re-phrasing incorrect structures in an acceptable manner for the child to hear (Van Dyke, 2006). Appropriation describes a child’s ability to use language that he or she had not previously been able to control. Re-structuring the child’s words puts the “teacher’s language . . . out there for the child’s subsequent appropriation if it is the ‘just-in-time’ language the child needs to be understood” (Van Dyke, 2006). The teacher’s language creates a scaffold, which is similar to the mother responding to a young child by continuing the conversation with more expert language structures (McNaughton, 1995).

The classroom needs to be structured so that ELLs have many opportunities to talk with more expert others. For children learning a new language, these opportunities are supported one on one or in small groups. Children might talk about books and share stories that they have written in a partner setting (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Children can be encouraged to work together to solve problems. Most young children are eager story tellers and, out of necessity, teachers often minimize the length of stories told because time is limited. ELLs must be invited and encouraged to tell stories (Rodriguez-Eagle, 2009). Teachers need to observe conversations carefully and “develop activities that encourage real dialogue between child-child and adult-child” (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 13). ELLs require more opportunities to talk and use language.

Reading Instruction in the Classroom

Reading instruction in the early years classroom typically takes place in a guided reading setting, wherein the teacher works with a small group of students. ELLs can be supported in this setting, but thought needs to be given to book selection, introduction of new vocabulary, and language structures (Rodriguez-Eagle, 2009). Before the child reads a new book, the teacher must provide a supportive introduction by discussing the meaning of the story as a whole, and by considering the problem and solution in addition to new language structures. Although the interaction is social in nature, it is teaching (Clay, 1998). The social aspect of the guided reading setting facilitates language development in ELLs (Iddings et al., 2009).

Careful book selection for ELLs ensures that the text is readable and understandable. By considering children's control of oral language structures, through the Record of Oral Language or notes of the children's longest utterance, the teacher can make a good match between the text and the readers. Teachers must anticipate what will be difficult (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). The closer the grammatical structure of the text is to that of the children's spoken language, the more the children's language structures can help in reading a new book (Kelly, 2009). At the same time, the text needs to "enrich their English vocabularies, help them learn about English language syntax, and understand how texts are structured" (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009, p. 437), promoting new language learning. Thoughtful book selection by the teacher ensures children's ability to read and understand the selected story.

The classroom teacher provides a critical link between reading and speaking by providing a thoughtful book introduction. The introduction engages children in conversation before reading a new text, and "helps ELLs become familiar with new concepts, text meaning, and English structures, and fosters their ability to problem-solve as they read new texts" (Kelly, 2009, p. 75). For ELLs, the introduction will likely include hearing and repeating language structures and unusual vocabulary used in the text of the new book, so that the structure can be used in reading (Cazden, 2005). Talking about a new book before reading gives students opportunities to practise speaking the language before reading the language.

Writing Instruction in the Classroom

Writing begins with the children's spoken language; writing is speech recorded in print form. Writing is a complex social activity which is strongly linked to speaking and reading (Harste et al., 1994). Teachers need to encourage complexity, not simplicity, when children record their stories, as complexity fosters language growth. In the classroom, ELLs could orally share their stories with a peer who might confirm, praise, and ask questions, further supporting language development. If ELLs orally rehearse before writing, they will have a way to say what they want to write.

Teachers need to be observant and monitor students' writing to ensure that equivalent complexity is seen when comparing the children's writing to their oral language and reading texts (Rodriguez-Eagle & Torres-Elias, 2009). Retaining the complexity of language is essential if children are to learn the nuances of language (Harste et al., 1994). Given teacher support, ELLs can be successful using advanced language, building a strong foundation for continued language development (Cazden, 1988). The writing of ELLs should match the language of their speech and the language they control in book reading.

In Reading Recovery lessons, teacher and child engage in a conversation that is developed into a story to be written down. Conversation would also support ELLs in the classroom to compose their own stories for writing. The value in the child recording a story that he or she has developed through conversation with the teacher is that "the child can draw upon established speaking competencies" (Clay, 2001, p. 33). "Oral and written language grow and develop in parallel" (Harste et al., 1994, p. 60), increasing the efficiency of language development.

Children's stories in written form provide familiar reading material. Children learn by reading

and re-reading their own written messages, which contain language structures and vocabulary that are controlled in speech. ELLs could also share their stories with others (Wilson, 2001), bridging writing with reading and speaking.

Conclusion

ELLs have language learning needs that must be considered when teaching them as readers, writers, and speakers. Reading Recovery teachers need to observe carefully and build on children's current understandings, by keeping texts meaningful: telling whole stories, reading complete books, and writing entire stories. Teaching must be explicit and must consider what children can do and what they need to do next. Reading Recovery teachers are required to provide massive opportunities for speaking, reading, and writing if ELLs are to become confident users of the English language.

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Understanding Quality Teacher Induction

David Gillingham

Abstract

Beginning teachers need high-quality induction supports to transition successfully into the teaching profession. The last three decades have seen the evolution of comprehensive induction programs to meet the support needs of teachers in their first three years of teaching as they take on ever varied roles in the school system. Central to an effective induction program, and ultimately the strengthening of beginning teacher teaching and student learning, are the identification and training of appropriate educative mentors, effective professional development plans, targeted feedback to the beginning teachers, and a supportive school culture.

As new entrants in the teaching profession, beginning teachers require high-quality induction programs to transition successfully from pre-service to in-service teaching. Acknowledging the importance of induction for beginning teachers, schools, school districts, and school systems have worked to develop induction programs that will provide beginning teachers with the support they need to be successful. Although all beginning teachers bring their own personal strengths and needs to the teaching profession, and require specific, individualized, supports, there are also some consistencies in the induction programs offered. The key to high-quality induction is an understanding of the induction frameworks, the provision of ongoing educative support at the school level during the first three years of teaching, the selection and training of appropriate educative mentors, the need for developmentally appropriate professional development, planned formative assessment of each beginning teacher, and supportive school administration. It is important to understand that quality beginning teacher induction combines these features into a program that supports beginning teachers to help them become successful classroom teachers, thus strengthening their teaching and student learning.

Trends

The definition of quality beginning teacher induction has changed markedly over the last thirty years, resulting from an increased understanding of teacher development by school system administrators (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Early induction programs for beginning teachers focused on informal one-to-one mentoring, whereas the most recent, high-quality induction programs are characterized by a comprehensive system of organized, educative mentor assistance, professional development, and formative assessment of beginning teachers in their first three years of teaching (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2004). In addition to officially planned induction during the first three years of teaching, quality induction programs link teacher preparation and practice, which supports the distinct learning needs of beginning teachers, before, and during their transition into the teaching profession (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). For example, induction programs are gradually expanding to provide structured support to beginning teachers before the beginning teachers take up their first teaching position, especially when beginning teachers already know the school and grade-level at which they will be teaching (Paris, 2010). Defining the nature of quality induction programs, and the important role they play in the successful integration of beginning teachers into the teaching profession, has resulted in specific, focused support for these teachers, and is tailored to each teacher's distinct learning needs.

Frameworks

Irrespective of the wide variety of schools and teaching assignments that beginning teachers experience, which play a significant part in determining their induction support needs, there are key frameworks that influence the way an induction program is designed. Firstly, induction is often considered a transitional phase in teacher development between pre-service and in-service professional development during which beginning teachers are evolving from students of teaching to teachers of students (Carver & Yusko, 1999). Thus, one component of a comprehensive induction program involves a guidance plan for beginning teachers during their transition to teaching emphasizing activities such as setting up the classroom or implementing classroom management routines. These are typically the immediate concerns of beginning teachers at the beginning of their careers.

A second framework considers induction as a socialization process in which beginning teachers acclimatize to the school and divisional culture, whereby powerful cultural norms often persuade beginning teachers to adapt to the status quo of schooling (Patterson, 2005). Induction focused on socialization stresses the development of skills that help beginning teachers feel like they fit into the culture of the school or division (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Socialization induction programs highlight school and divisional policies and procedures, teaching expectations, standards, commonalities, such as curricular materials to be used, and the amount of homework to be done per night. These programs are conducted through an orientation process that emphasizes beginning teacher acclimatization to the school or divisional climate (Winstead Fry, 2009). Thus, these programs often involve meetings to discuss the school expectations and culture, with the expectation that beginning teachers will adapt to become part of the staff, and school, environment.

A third framework of induction is the provision of intensive support, professional development and formative assessment for beginning teachers (AEE, 2004). This view of induction concentrates on developing beginning teachers' subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills over time, and places a heavy reliance on a substantive mentorship process (Cherian & Daniel, 2008). This support is provided over a longer term, and is based on reflective discussion, questioning, modelling, and feedback between beginning teachers and their educative mentor. Although very helpful in isolation, these three frameworks each contain critical elements of a successful induction program, which are all necessary for an effective induction process at the school level.

Mentors

Providing this ongoing education and support for beginning teachers is required at the school level since it is not possible to cover all of the issues and topics that beginning teachers encounter on the job during an orientation or socialization induction process (Bartell, 2005). In a school setting, this ongoing support is most commonly provided by educative mentors, who interact with beginning teachers in ways that help them learn in, and from, their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Individuals who take on the role of educative mentors commonly have personal attributes that allow them to interact comfortably with beginning teachers, conduct formative assessment observations, reflect with the beginning teachers on their strengths and areas for future growth, and have the team skills to co-plan and co-teach to strengthen each beginning teacher's instruction and classroom environment (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). Accordingly, the selection of appropriate educative mentors is a critical component of a quality induction program.

Appropriate educative mentor candidates demonstrate quality instructional practice in their own classroom, reflective approaches to their own teaching, content knowledge and expert subject-based pedagogy, the commitment to ongoing personal and professional growth, excellent interpersonal skills, and empathy to the needs of beginning teachers (Wood &

Stanulis, 2009). Furthermore, it is ideal that educative mentors be matched to beginning teachers according to school size, grade level, and subject (Bartell 2005). The selection of appropriate educative mentors is critical in providing ongoing professional education and support for beginning teachers. Additionally, educative mentors need professional development themselves, in order to maximise their effectiveness in the mentorship role.

Training and professional development for educative mentors before, and during, the induction program, helps the mentors develop the skills necessary to help beginning teachers improve their practices. Gaining competence in understanding beginning teachers' needs, participating in mentorship simulations, and working with other mentors to share and learn, helps educative mentors develop their own sense of confidence and efficacy in their ability to support beginning teachers (Schwille & Dynak, 2000). This development of educative mentors' skills helps beginning teachers cope with their responsibilities and roles as teachers, and helps them to learn how to teach in ways that promote the successful engagement and learning of all of their learners (New Zealand Teachers Council, n.d.). Thus, mentor preparation is an important factor influencing beginning teachers' classroom practices.

Professional Development

In addition to educative mentor training, developmentally appropriate professional development for beginning teachers, which to be effective has as its core goal the notion that participation in professional development activities improves teaching practices, is a requirement for quality beginning teacher induction (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Quality induction programs deliver this professional development in many ways, but all focus on deepening beginning teachers' content knowledge, classroom management skills, and ability to establish and maintain good relationships with students and their families (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Professional development must offer beginning teachers the opportunity to focus on critical problems of practice that are school based, and embedded in teacher work, and, when provided often enough and long enough, ensures progressive gain in knowledge, skills, and confidence (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). Additionally, professional development provides an opportunity for interaction between the mentors and beginning teachers focused on questions, research-based inquiry, and reflections of new understandings of subject matter, students, and teaching and learning, which emphasize learning as the centre of teaching, for both teachers and students (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Thus, effective induction requires that developmentally appropriate professional development be strategically planned, in order to focus on improving student learning through improving teacher performance, and encouraging authentic collaborative learning between the mentors and the beginning teachers.

Formative Assessment

During this collaborative process, formative assessment needs to be provided to beginning teachers, with the goal of improving teaching practices. Frequent observations, mentor feedback, and reflective questioning by the mentor teachers are all part of a series of structured formative assessment activities carried out by the mentors and beginning teachers, whereby the beginning teachers learn how to self-assess their professional competence (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). In turn, beginning teachers are able to become more professionally self-sufficient, to feel more competent, and to be more confident about the quality of education that they are providing to students in their classrooms (Winstead Fry, 2009). Increasing these traits in beginning teachers frequently leads to enhanced job performance and satisfaction, resulting in better student learning and higher rates of teacher retention. Consequently, a quality induction program must include ongoing, planned formative assessments, which provide beginning teachers with the chance to learn about, and improve, their practices over time.

Role of Administration

Administrators, especially principals, play vital roles in providing beginning teachers with opportunities to learn about, and improve, their teaching practices (AEE, 2004). Although most beginning teachers cite their mentors as the most important people in their entry to teaching, many also cite having supportive principals as the most critical factor in their professional development (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Effective implementation of the induction components depends on the site administrator's leadership and commitment to induction (Cherian & Daniel, 2008). The role that principals play in quality induction is extensive and includes acting as facilitators of educative mentoring through approving and providing sanctioned time and resources for the induction program, advocating for beginning teachers by visiting their classrooms regularly, talking to them about their lessons, expressing an interest in their progress, and giving them advice on how to avoid teacher burnout (Wood, 2005). Thus, supportive school administration is essential for high-quality induction programming, and for creating a school culture that welcomes, values, and supports beginning teachers.

Principals have key roles in building a supportive school culture for beginning teachers and often set the tone for how easy or difficult it is for beginning teachers to be accepted into the school's learning community. Supportive principals understand that beginning teachers placed in poor working conditions, with large classes, high numbers of students with learning or behavioural difficulties, insufficient classroom resources, and new assignments each year, are likely to fail (Patterson, 2005). Principals also have the responsibility to encourage shared definitions of knowledge, teaching, and learning, in order to establish a common language with which beginning teachers and mentors can discuss teaching and learning (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000). Thus, administrators in high-quality induction programs must work to ensure that beginning teachers are treated fairly in the school environment, which promotes their development and learning.

Conclusion

It is essential that beginning teachers receive high-quality induction to successfully transition into the teaching profession. Over the last thirty years, the definition of quality induction has evolved as schools, school divisions, and school systems have developed comprehensive systems of support for beginning teachers, based on the needs of each beginning teacher. The wide variety of roles that beginning teachers fill, requires that quality induction programs engage them in ongoing educative support over the first three years of teaching. Essential to this support is the selection and training of appropriate educative mentor teachers who will engage beginning teachers in developmentally appropriate professional development, and provide formative assessment of beginning teachers to strengthen their teaching and learning. In addition, supportive school administrators are needed to create a school environment that reinforces and validates a high-quality induction program. Therefore, to ensure that beginning teachers are successful in their first three years in the teaching profession, it is necessary to understand the components of induction, and to implement high-quality induction programs for all beginning teachers.

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OPINION PAPERS

Classrooms: Meaningful Microcosms

Jennifer Borgfjord

Have you ever worked in an environment with co-workers who were all the same age as you? Is that environment quiet and orderly? Are all the areas of your job broken down into separate sections? Chances are, in today's world, the one answer to these questions is "no." However, most schools continue to organize classrooms into single-grade structures wherein quiet orderliness is expected, and different teachers deliver curricula as separate units. In my opinion, deeper and more meaningful learning experiences occur in multi-level classrooms. The very nature of these environments mirrors real-life experiences and better prepares youth for life beyond school. These microcosmic communities epitomize our much larger world.

My experiences of teaching in a multi-level learning community have been the richest, most rewarding, and challenging of my career. I learned to teach children, not subjects. I made my biggest mistakes and experienced my greatest successes during this time, which contributed to my growth as an educator and the development of strong beliefs in the power of teaching and learning in a combined grade setting. There were many benefits for teaching and learning, and the development of citizenship. My growth as a teacher was exponential during this time.

The benefits for teaching and learning were many for both teacher and students. I could see the learning over the years in the behaviour of the children as well as on paper in portfolios and assessment binders. The students and I created a continuum of learning, whereby the focus was on the learner. We carried projects and learning targets into following years, which led to deeper and more meaningful learning. Significant gains in language and reading were achieved primarily because most activities were student centred and subject integrated. These experiences fostered the students' growth of independence and allowed them to construct their own meaning of concepts. Furthermore, I found ways to promote learning when primary methods of instruction failed. I would be working with the same children in subsequent years, so I had to rethink my instruction. Instruction and assessment were relevant to the needs of students, not to the demands of curricula. Another epiphany for me was that all of the children were special in the sense that they all had individual learning needs. Learning experiences were tailored to the ability of each student. My students were not the only learners in our classroom.

Multi-level learning communities are also powerful tools for building community and creating responsible citizens. There are many social and emotional benefits to learning in these classrooms, as the format creates a sense of security and belonging. Deeper connections are created between students and teacher. In my classroom setting, we needed to find ways to work with each other, even when personalities clashed. The act of peer tutoring became a normal way of learning, because the best way to learn something is to teach it. Furthermore, outcomes could be worked on in following years without having to retain or fail. My students practised responsible citizenship and community building.

Multi-level classrooms are not a new concept. Some school division choose these mixed-age classrooms out of necessity due to low enrolment; others choose them for philosophical reasons. The bottom line is that teaching and learning in such a learning community is not easy. The multi-level structure is not enough. In order to be successful, these classrooms need to provide a meaningful, rich, and safe environment for all learners and teachers. The great news is that all educators have elements of multi-level learning communities in their classrooms. They may not teach the same children for more than one year, but there are many different levels present even in a single-grade classroom. These ideas are applicable in most classrooms, but are critical to the success of a multi-level environment.

Careful planning and management of experiences, coupled with infusion of available technology and communication with the community, are critical to the success of multi-level classrooms. Teacher willingness to teach in this capacity is essential, bolstered by supportive leadership. Educators in these classrooms need time to learn and grow as facilitators, and they need proper resources at their disposal. Furthermore, these leaders need flexible and creative natures to deliver instruction and assessment practices. A big budget also helps! Job-embedded professional development is indispensable to the success of teaching and learning. Networks of professional friends via Professional Learning Communities, Professional Learning Networks, email groups, and face-to-face meetings are also advantageous. The advancement of technology provides amazingly beneficial additions to the multi-level classroom. Small laptops facilitate ease of use; children can take them into their work area instead of taking their work to the computer area. Hand-held gadgets, such as MP3 players, are valuable teaching tools that immediately engage learners. Not only are these devices helpful, but the students also feel that they “look cool” using them. Fortunately, tools are also available for teachers to monitor progress and ensure that students are on task.

Another sometimes forgotten element is that of the wider community. Many times, caregivers feel that classrooms should run in the same way as when they went to school, and they are strongly opposed to a combined grade format. It is important to explain the research and experiences that show why classrooms have to evolve. With thoughtful communications, opinions will change. Invite parents into the classroom. Publicly display student work, communicate through journals and phone calls. Publish a newsletter highlighting student work and include a spot for teachers to share their thoughts and ideas, and explain why concepts are presented in different ways.

Why do we teach? We are preparing our students for life in the real world. Our students need to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and lifelong learners. Properly implemented multi-level classrooms are flexible environments that combine learners, and honour and value individual differences and abilities in all students. These microcosmic communities are a meaningful way to provide our students with the opportunity to practise the skills required to interact successfully in our much larger world.

Philosophy of Differentiated Instruction

Dayna Laturnus

Differentiated instruction (DI) is a necessary strategy for planning instruction for all learners in response to the standards-based reform that has developed with the inclusive movement. It strives to meet all student needs regardless of age, sex, gender, culture, religion, socio-economic status, and intellectual or physical disabilities. DI draws a teacher's attention away from presumptions about what a child "cannot do," to learning and discovering the methods by which a child "can do." Contemporary educational systems are standards based, so "local school districts, states, and the federal government have each set standards that all students must achieve regardless of the teacher, socioeconomic status, disabilities, or other differences in either the educational institution or the student" (Levy, 2008, p. 161). DI methods ensure that instructional choices provide every student with the optimum opportunity to learn.

DI is based on the premise that it will meet individual students where they are when they begin a school year, and will move their learning forward as far as possible as they move along their educational journeys. The instructional goals that are established for each child should be flexible in what and how new learning opportunities are presented. DI also requires that new learning is connected to previous learning, and that this new learning is ultimately related to real-life experiences so that students internalize their learning in a meaningful way. As well, it encourages teachers to become more creative by moving beyond their own preferences and biases to meet the learning needs of all students, particularly of those who struggle and of those who excel in their abilities.

At DI's central core are content, process, and product. It is imperative that the focus of students' learning is based upon their own individual strengths, their personal and academic needs, and their individual thinking and learning styles. It is vital that educators understand the distinction between learning abilities and styles, and recognize that "a style of thought is a preference for using abilities in certain ways. It is not an ability itself, but the way one likes to utilize abilities" (Sternberg & Zhan, 2005, p. 245). Learning styles are individual preferences in learning materials. Styles matter. It is not uncommon for teachers to misinterpret learning styles "with abilities, so that students are thought to be incompetent – not because they are lacking in abilities, but because their styles of thinking do not match the styles of the people creating the assessments" (Sternberg & Zhan, 2005, p. 252). Teacher misconceptions can have a detrimental influence on student assessment and reporting, and on the students' self-perceptions of who they are as learners.

It is important to understand the thinking preferences in DI planning and to capitalize on these resources for each student, as they are ultimately important for future success. Teachers need to be diligent in order to ensure that they know and understand all of the children in their rooms, know their likes and dislikes, understand their personal thinking and learning styles, and create learning opportunities that permit the students to learn and express their learning in the ways that are most natural for them. Educators also need to be cognizant of the fact that their practices within the educational setting can either enrich students' opportunities or deprive them of opportunities for future success. Knowing students as persons is vital to ensuring future success.

The utilization of DI can enhance an awareness of and appreciation for the uniqueness of all students, not just those who find school difficult. It focuses on instructing all students as a heterogeneous group. Following whole-group instruction, small groups can be created according to learning needs or styles, in order to reinforce learning. The grouping of students does not focus on set ability levels, but is based upon the teachers' short-term goals for meeting set criteria in order to achieve the desired standard. Thus, learner objectives and performance

expectations are not lowered, although the content might be differentiated through the use of texts or stories at varying reading levels.

Student grouping should never be static. Student grouping assists students in being more aware of their own learning styles and preferences, and those of others as well. It provides opportunities for students to assist each other in their learning journeys by combining similar strengths and by combining a variety of strengths so that all learning is enriched and enhanced. The type of grouping should focus on ability levels, learning styles, and interest levels.

Assessment is critical to the success of implementing DI strategies. Good assessment strategies demand that “teachers determine at the onset of their planning what their students should know and what each child should be able to do at the conclusion of the lesson or unit” (Anderson, 2007, p. 50). In order to meet the needs of each student, pre-assessments must occur to provide an accurate picture of where students are currently performing, so that instruction can begin precisely where each student is. The use of formative assessment to readjust activities or presentation of learning is critical to the success of each student. Summative assessments assist in determining whether the students have learned what was taught. It is important to keep in mind that the assessment tools do not need to be identical, as one student might not achieve to his or her best ability with the same test as another individual.

I believe that it is not only the teachers’ responsibility to teach each student content, but it is their legal, moral, and ethical responsibility and obligation to ensure that all students receive the best learning opportunities possible. Teachers need to move beyond their own learning style in order to accommodate the different styles of their students. Effective teachers must do all that is in their power to ensure that the needs of all students are met on academic, emotional, and social levels. These efforts should include conducting ongoing self-learning audits and reflective inventories that identify areas for further professional development.

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