



LEADING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: OUR PRINCIPAL PURPOSE DIRIGER LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES, NOTRE LIGNE DIRECTRICE

*A partnership between the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the
Provincial Principals' Associations (ADFO, CPCO and OPC)*

Friday, January 27th, 2006

SYMPOSIUM

DELTA TORONTO AIRPORT WEST

Opening Remarks: Serge Plouffe – ADFO

The project entitled, “Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose” was developed to increase the achievement of students in literacy and numeracy. To achieve this goal, Principals in participating Boards formed Professional Learning Teams whose purpose was to focus on the improved achievement in literacy and numeracy by all students in their schools. The method implemented to accomplish this task was twofold: the formation of a Professional Learning Community and the development of an action research plan in each Principal’s school. Participating Principals have gathered at the symposium on January 27th in order to network and exchange information on works in progress, successes achieved, and challenges to be faced.

Morning Session: Dr. Richard Sagor – Action Research

In this project, all Principals have committed to undertaking their own action research within the context of school improvement, with the goal being improved student achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Richard Sagor’s presentation provided a specific and detailed process for implementing an action research project in a school. This process consists of four stages:

1. Clarifying Your Vision/Targets (determining what you want to see – precise outcomes);
2. Articulating Your Theory (planning the best way to achieve or get to the outcomes);
3. Implementing Your Theory (acting out the plan and collecting data);
4. Reflecting on Results (examining the data to see what it tells and deciding how to act on it).

Key Points

- In deciding outcomes and preparing the plan, it is imperative that each encompasses all students, not just a high percentage of students.
- There must be absolute agreement by all staff on the vision/target (the desired outcome for students) and the tool(s) to be used to measure the level of success in achieving the vision/target.
- The route to arrive at the target and point of measurement can vary with teachers.

- There must be a detailed implementation roadmap in the form of a graphic reconstruction. This visual depiction provides a convincing plan and is easy to revise as the implementation evolves. Each revision can be posted to show the evolution and improvement that has occurred.
- Principals participating in this workshop presentation found the step-by-step process and templates for each stage very relevant and applicable to the tasks they are expected to perform as part of the project.

Luncheon Address: Dr. Ben Levin, Deputy Minister of Education

Dr. Levin began by acknowledging the challenges inherent in the job of “Principal”:

- Increased focus on student outcomes;
- The large number of initiatives in the province;
- The workload for Principals as a result of the increased number of teachers hired in Ontario;
- Federation issues.

Dr. Levin focused his attention on hearing and answering questions from the floor:

Question: The province is considering increasing the number of P.D. Days during the school year. There is concern that these days will be prescribed, when, in reality, more flexibility based on school needs is advisable and preferred by Principals. Please comment.

Answer: P.D. is an issue, and there will be an increase in the number of P.D. Days. Dr. Levin acknowledged the need for a model that works in all schools. He advised that Principals raise the issue in a formal way.

Question: The Principals appreciate the organizations that have made this project possible. The opportunity for exploring and sharing ideas has been a positive professional experience. Please comment.

Answer: Dr. Levin supports activities that focus on real, meaningful work. He supports work in a world where individuals can get away from their daily tasks to examine the big picture.

The Minister of Education wants to see evidence that the project makes a difference. There must be evidence of improvement in teaching practice, in the data, and in the relationship between schools and the community.

Question: The project requires more time to be successful. Can we get a commitment to extend it from one to two years?

Answer: Dr. Levin re-affirmed that there are resources to extend the project to two years. Although public concerns have been expressed (i.e. money is being spent to take Principals out of school again), the government is willing “to take the heat.”

Question: There is resistance from the federation concerning the way P.D. is being done in our schools. Please comment.

Answer: During the 1990’s, people got into a mode of yelling and screaming, and some are continuing to do so. This is not necessary today in the current climate of professional respect. There is a realization that conversation among the parties involved is critical prior to decisions being made. The Minister has been talking to federation leaders. For example, the Stability Commission has been established to manage disputes. We are moving forward on this concern.

Afternoon Session: Part 1 - Successes Resulting from the Project

1. P.D. for Principals/Networking/Professional Dialogue

The overwhelming response by all participating Principals was to affirm the importance of the ongoing professional development for Principals in the form of PLT's (Professional Learning Teams). They stressed the importance of a "relationship of trust", a climate of "risk-taking", and the opportunity for "sharing".

Some major points that came out in the discussion included:

- P.D. included leadership skills development;
- Professional dialogues were more focused – e.g. data management, student achievement in literacy and numeracy, best practices re: PLC implementation, etc.;
- There were opportunities to meet at one another's schools to see effective programs in action;
- Support is provided for new Principals;
- There is Board wide support for Professional Learning Communities in schools;
- People skilled in certain strategies model this for Principals so that they can do the same with their staffs.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The collection and use of data by Principals to determine school needs and to facilitate school improvement plans has increased as a result of the project. Principals in the project understand the need for data collection and analysis and have endeavoured to increase their knowledge and skill in this area.

Some major points that came out in the discussion included:

- Data is used to identify students at risk;
- Data collection and analysis is linked to school improvement, instructional planning, and P.D.;
- Schools are using the theory of SMART Goals as a framework for planning;
- Workshops have been held on using data to set targets, drive instruction and inform parents;
- Time is provided for data analysis;
- "Assessment Walls" have been established in schools;
- Principals are using "walk throughs" to collect data;
- Boards have set up vehicles such as a "Board Student Data Warehouse" to enable Principals to access data.

3. The Role of Principal as Instructional Leader

There were many references to the fact that the project has resulted in a refocusing on the role of Principal as Instructional Leader. In most instances, the Principal has become responsible for modeling enthusiasm for lifelong learning, data analysis, instructional strategies, collaborative professional discussion, emotional intelligence, differentiated learning, etc. The Professional

Learning Teams of which the Principals are members have assisted them in their complex role as instructional leaders in their schools.

Some major points that came out in the discussion included:

- Principals are involved in discussions on instructional leadership, which increases their knowledge and skill;
- Principals observe models to use with staff;
- Principals are able to move schools from a culture of “collegiality” to a more intense culture of “collegiality with a focus”, specifically a focus on student achievement; therefore, everything at the school level is connected to the common purpose of improving student achievement;
- Principals are able to convey the concept of a Professional Learning Community to their staffs and begin building school structure and culture on this model.

4. A Cohesive Plan Across the District

Principals pointed out the importance of a Board wide focus and the structures to support that focus. In the case of this project, the focus has been on improved student achievement in literacy and numeracy, and the vehicle for accomplishing this has been the establishment of Professional Learning Communities in schools. This is a big undertaking and the final goal has certainly not been achieved, but movement forward is occurring in various ways and to various degrees within participating Boards.

These are some of the initiatives that have begun:

- There is a pervasive influence across the Board to change the culture of the Board – OP Mentorship Group, SO meetings with Principals, the Director’s meeting, FOS (Family of Schools) meetings;
- PLC’s have been established at the FOS level;
- DuFour’s book is being used in all schools in the district;
- There is an alignment of “School Growth Plans” to an increase in literacy and numeracy achievement;
- SMART Goals form the foundation for the development and implementation of school effectiveness plans in all schools;
- There is intense support for teachers in their work from the Principals, Superintendents and Consultants;
- Opportunities exist to try “like” strategies in the district schools and share results.

5. Resources

Throughout the summary notes supplied by the Principals are repeated references to the resources that have been available to them and their teachers in the form of books, time, money and P.D. experiences. It has been these very concrete resources that have provided the foundation for development and change.

The following are some of the highlights:

- The DuFour model of a PLC;
- On Common Ground –edited by DuFour,
- OPC/CPCO workshops and support;

- The theory of SMART Goals;
- “Data for Dummies” – a program for Principals to learn how to use data to tell a story to teachers and parents;
- “Data Information Platform” (DIP) – research department development connected to curriculum and accountability;
- Resources from EYNP and OAME;
- Dialogue with the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat;
- In-services – “Emotional Intelligence” and “Vital Signs”;
- Math materials – Word Math Walls, Number Carpet, OPC Math Workshop, Building Math Knowledge Base;
- Literacy Co-coordinators who provide individual and group P.D.;
- Release time for teachers;
- Teacher Resource Bookrooms in schools.

Part 2: Challenges Facing Those Involved in the Project

In reviewing the summary notes submitted by Principals on the successes and the challenges resulting from the project, it became very apparent that there were many more examples of successes than challenges in the materials they provided. This would seem to indicate that in the minds of these Principals, the successes outweigh the challenges. They did, however, point out three specific areas that require attention as the project proceeds.

1. Time

The need for “time” is the challenge repeatedly highlighted by those involved in the project.

According to their written comments, time is required to:

- Plan PLT sessions;
- Analyze data;
- Develop plans for effective change;
- Provide release time for teachers to share, plan, implement and measure;
- Become knowledgeable about leadership skills, PLC’s, data collection and analysis, best practice, success in other schools, etc.;
- Create an imbedded and accepted time block for learning communities to meet.

2. Motivation/Sustainability

Principals around the province who are currently involved in the project are enthusiastic and committed to the tasks before them. The challenge will be to keep the momentum going, especially given the complexity of the Principal’s role and the demands on his/her time, energy and expertise.

The other factor that could affect the sustainability of the project involves population and geography. In large Boards (e.g. TDSB), the number of teachers is so great that it is a formidable task to get all of them involved and committed to this initiative of building PLC’s and enhancing student achievement. In Boards that consist of fewer schools but cover a sizeable geographical area, the challenge is bringing teachers together and building consistency and community across the district.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

While the consensus is that data collection and analysis is one of the major successes of the project, this success is also viewed as an ongoing challenge.

There are three aspects to the data challenge:

- Determining an effective way to collect data
- Determining an effective way to measure and understand changes the data indicates have occurred
- Providing the time for individuals to develop knowledge/skill and to plan using this knowledge/skill.

Closing Remarks: Dr. Avis Glaze, Chief Student Achievement Officer, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

Dr. Glaze concluded the symposium with a densely packed presentation that affirmed the importance of the existence of a PLC in every school in order to engage teachers in discussions of their craft, the focus being improved literacy and numeracy.

To encourage continued efforts in this project and to underscore the importance of the work, she painted a picture of the current reality:

- Literacy and numeracy are improving;
- The gender gap is closing;
- One in four Canadians struggles with literacy issues;
- A 26% unemployment rate exists for those with low literacy skills compared to 4% for the literate population;
- Literacy and numeracy skills impact the economy – a 10% gain in literacy results in an 18.5 billion dollar per year increase;
- Developing countries will surpass Canada if the literacy and numeracy skills do not increase;
- Inadequate education adds costs to the nation in terms of less tax revenue, increased crime, etc.;
- A single global marketplace exists;
- There is open sourcing in the global economy;
- The majority of students in many of our schools are comprised of minority groups;
- In every school there are students living in poverty, a situation that hinders their progress.

Given these elements of the current reality, Dr. Glaze emphasized the necessity of an attitudinal change on the part of teachers. Beliefs shape action. Therefore, the focus must be on developing a belief in teachers that all students can learn and that failure is not an option. The role of the Principal is to help colleagues realize the changes that have taken place in the world, the attitudes necessary to succeed in the changing economy, and the beliefs and practices they must adopt to help their students succeed.

The imperatives are as follows:

- Literacy and numeracy;
- Achievement;
- Program dictated budget priorities;
- Accountability for results;
- Principals as instructional leaders;
- Data driven decisions;
- Equity of outcome;
- Strong public relations (access, involvement, engagement).