

Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose

Friday, January 26, 2007

Symposium

**Toronto Airport Marriott
901 Dixon Road, Toronto**

Welcome: Nil Parent, ADFO

Nil Parent welcomed participants and reviewed the agenda for the day. He then gave a brief history of *Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose*, explaining that the establishment of Principal Learning Teams where members could learn together when provided with the framework for the project. The original intent was that these learning teams would give principals the opportunity to build their capacity as instructional leaders so that they could then begin to develop Professional Learning Communities in their schools. At this point, 34 boards from across Ontario are participating in the project. Parent concluded his remarks by acknowledging the leadership provided by Dr. Avis Glaze, the CEO and Chief Achievement Officer of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.

Keynote Address: Dr. Avis Glaze, CEO and Chief Achievement Officer Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

Dr. Glaze expressed appreciation for the work of those involved in the project: supervisory officers, principals, and vice-principals; OPC, CPCO, and ADFO; Curriculum Services Canada; and the workers in the Secretariat.

Many positive developments have occurred since the project began. The gap between those achieving success and those not doing so has decreased. Many more students are entering college. There is also an increased sense of hope. Each of these is the result of a new candour in education, whereby an examination of public education and a focus on instruction is taking place. Additional improvements include a clear focus on student achievement, the use of data in decision-making, job-embedded professional development, more available resources, an increase in the number of teachers, and smaller class sizes. On the other hand, there is still much to be done in that a large gap continues to exist between the lowest-performing and highest-performing boards.

The good news, however, is that only 5% of boards are in the low-performing category compared to 19% three years ago. Furthermore, the number of boards showing improvement in achievement is significant, as the following data indicates: 99% of boards have shown improvement in reading; 96% have shown improvement in writing; and 92% have shown improvement in mathematics. We also know that schools in challenging circumstances can experience success with a good principal and an excellent staff.

In coming years, equity of outcome will be a major focus. Poverty is no longer an excuse we can use to rationalize achievement gaps in mathematics and reading. We must address these gaps, and, in order to do so, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat is targeting specific interventions and providing assistance. Examples are as follows:

- *What Works*;
- *Schools on the Move*;
- LNS webcasts (also available on DVD);
- The ‘Capacity Building Team’ (led by Judith Taylor);
- *Teacher Moderation*.

The data clearly illustrate that the gaps do exist. For example, whereas children of well-educated middle class parents have a vocabulary of approximately 12,000 words by Grade 3, those from less fortunate circumstances possess a much more limited vocabulary of some 4,000 words. If such children are left behind, resulting in a large portion of our population being uneducated, Canada will not remain great. The time has come to redouble our efforts. If children cannot read by the end of Grade 2 or 3, they will not catch up.

There is also the divide created by technology. Here again, we must not leave behind those who lack the wherewithal to afford the new technology. To address this situation, we should broker the resources we already have. One possibility is keeping schools open at night so that everyone has access to computers. Perhaps school councils could take on the responsibility of organizing their community to help students in need. The main role of educators is to make a difference for those who “don’t have,” and our leaders will be judged on how they made a difference for the disadvantaged. For this reason, equity and excellence must go hand in hand.

Another reality today is the “New Age” learner, the child who has grown up with the Internet. We must learn to understand this group of learners whose world is saturated with media images in order to develop teaching strategies that work effectively for them.

The challenge facing education leaders today is undertaking the task of transforming our organization. To do so effectively requires the following:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency.
2. Forming a strong coalition.
3. Creating a vision.
4. Communicating the vision.
5. Empowering others to act.
6. Planning for short-term wins while keeping in mind the long-term goals.
7. Consolidating improvement and producing more change.
8. Institutionalizing new approaches.

The Professional Learning Community is one method for implementing change that results in the transformation of an organization. It is characterized as an inclusive group of individuals who share a common mission, are motivated by a vision, hold similar

values, and work towards a mutually understood goal. Dr. Glaze referred to the work of Louise Stoll and listed a number of the characteristics Stoll identifies as key to a strong Professional Learning Community. These include collective responsibility for student learning, professional inquiry, results orientation, mutual trust, and collaboration.

At this point, Dr. Glaze asked for input from the participants regarding the impact of the project. The following sample responses typify reactions to the project:

Patricia-Keewatin District School Board: The team from this board is in its second year in the project. Forming a Principal Learning Community has proved valuable for these principals, for it has resulted in a number of positive developments: the principals have taken their knowledge back to their schools and formed a PLC there; they have been able to increase their understanding of statistical data and teaching strategies; they are using the same ‘language’ across the district; and this consistent usage has spread to the teachers as well.

Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario: The project has resulted in systems-level results. Furthermore, it has been a banner year for professional development for leaders across the province. Now more boards are taking advantage of the opportunities available and more boards are asking to be included in the project.

Toronto Catholic District School Board (Response #1): The alignment across the system has been so positive and the moral purpose behind the project so powerful that people feel they are really making a difference for the individual student. The vision is such a positive one that there is hope this will be sustained and that the project will continue into Year Three.

Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario: The monthly meetings of principals where they have focused on student achievement have provided a remarkable opportunity for important discussion of this issue.

Toronto Catholic District School Board (Response #2): One of the participants spoke of a personal experience he had had the previous day, where a Grade Three student had approached him to tell him how well he could now read. The principal saw the child’s enthusiasm and pride as one very positive indication of the success of the project.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Glaze stated that participants’ responses make it clear that there is appreciation for the project, and that much of the credit is due to the three principals’ associations.

She continued by asserting that educators have power and that it is incumbent on them to use their political voice to advocate for teachers, schools, and children. For this reason, principal’s qualifications courses should include the opportunity to learn and practise influencing skills so that leaders are able to tell their stories to the public.

Dr. Glaze adapted her final thoughts from Stephen Covey's recent book, *Everyday Leadership*, because they link so closely with the vision, values, and goals of the project. Covey advocates a form of leadership in which people do the right things, care about others, and are transition-oriented. They enjoy a life of everyday greatness, basing their actions on a set of guiding principles which, in turn, lead them to experience a life of satisfaction.

On a final note, Dr. Glaze stressed the importance of working as a team and introduced the DVD *Lessons from Geese* as a means of reinforcing this theme.

Note:

The *Lessons from Geese* DVD is available through OPC. The package includes a facilitator's guide and worksheets.

Leading and Learning: Student Achievement in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances

**Dr. Denese Belchetz, Co-ordinating Superintendent, York District School Board
Lynne Hyne, Former Director, Curriculum Services Canada**

Origin of the Project

The project *Leading and Learning: Student Achievement in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances* was initiated by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.

Deliverables Requested

1. Research component: There was awareness that certain schools were making a difference and were effectively addressing challenging circumstances. The need became apparent for an Ontario-based research initiative that would encapsulate successful themes that lead to successful practice.
2. Visual component: It was also decided that the need existed for training modules on these themes, available free of charge.

Purposes of the Project

The project was intended to fulfill three purposes:

1. Contribute to the knowledge base regarding successful practices.
2. Provide evidence-based accounts of successful practices.
3. Provide the basis for sustainability of improved student learning and achievement.

Research Background

There was awareness that certain schools have demonstrated success despite challenging circumstances. EQAO scores were used as a guide to pinpoint schools that were improving,

The research methodology was then established, and included interviews of principals, teachers, and focus groups as well as a survey component.

From the research, 11 themes were initially identified as answering the question: “What improved student achievement?” From these, a list of key themes or practices was developed:

- Leadership (of the principal)
- P.L. (professional learning)
- Literacy capacity (and building this capacity)
- Effective use of data
- Parent/community involvement
- Beyond the classroom (engaging students beyond the classroom, beyond the regular day)

Online Training Site (www.curriculum.org/leadingandlearning/)

When first entering the website, the user should click on “View Intro.” The main page of the site provides the following choices:

- Video introductions by both Dr. Ben Levin and Dr. Avis Glaze
- Introduction: OISE Research
- Tour of the Site
- The Importance of Context
- Leadership Learning Modules
- The Learning Path: Individual Learning (learning on your own) and Facilitated Group Session (facilitating a group or working with a group)

Modules

The website contains six learning modules:

1. Using Data Effectively
2. Distributing Leadership
3. Building Literacy Capacity
4. Building Parent and Community Relationships
5. Creating Opportunities Beyond the Classroom
6. Supporting Professional Learning

For each module, there is an Overview and Key Research Findings. In addition, the user has the choice of Individual Learning or Facilitated Group Session.

The presenters used the first module, Using Data Effectively, to illustrate the Individual Learning path/route, then used the second module, Distributing Leadership, to illustrate the Facilitated Group Session path/route. In each case, they pointed out the series of activities and resources available for the given module and route selected.

The equipment needed to use the website includes a computer, high-speed Internet access, and an LCD projector. In addition, facilitator guides and DVDs for all of the material can be ordered from Curriculum Services Canada.

Next Steps

Participants were shown the MISA: Barrie Region PLC website as an example of how *Leading and Learning* has been integrated into the context of their activities. For more information, visit www.curriculum.org/MISABARRIE/resourceweb.html.

Reflection

Presenters asked participants to answer the question, “How can we use the power of *Leading and Learning: Student Achievement in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances* in professional learning teams?” They asked participants to consider the use in their principal learning teams as well as their school teams.

Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose – First Year Results

Dr. Kenneth Leithwood, Professor of Educational Leadership, OISE/UT

Dr. Leithwood proposed that LSA might be viewed in one or both of the following ways:

1. A strategy for improving students’ literacy and numeracy achievement in the province (a focus on the project’s impact on teaching and learning).
2. An approach to “leadership learning” on a large scale (a focus on the project’s impact on leadership capacities and organizational conditions).

Surveys completed by teachers and principals during and at the end of Year One of the project produced evidence concerning each of the proposed approaches.

With regard to the first proposal, a strategy for improving achievement in literacy and numeracy, evidence suggests:

- Teachers’ literacy instruction changed in the desired direction.
- Teachers’ mathematics instruction changed very little, if any.
- No significant changes in teachers’ general instructional practice occurred.
- No significant relationships between changes in instruction and changes in achievement, either in literacy or numeracy, were evident.
- No significant relationships between mean achievement levels in either literacy or numeracy and teachers’ instructional practices in either literacy or numeracy were evident.

With regard to the second proposal, a strategy for developing leadership learning on a large scale, evidence suggests:

- Desirable changes in leadership team practices occurred.

- Collaboration by both leaders and teachers in Professional Learning Communities increased.
- Teachers perceived moderate to substantial influence on their work from school leaders.
- Leader participants believed they benefited from their project experiences.
- Leaders became much more focused on teaching and learning in their schools, especially in relation to literacy and numeracy.
- Leaders' use of evidence to make decisions about literacy and numeracy instruction and to set targets in these areas of the curriculum increased substantially.

Dr. Leithwood presented the following conclusions:

As a strategy for improving student achievement, LSA has yet to demonstrate much impact, but it is unquestionably too early in the life of the project for this to be a reasonable expectation.

As an approach to leadership learning on a large scale, LSA shows promising signs of significant impact. It is reasonable to expect this impact to grow and to have an influence on the quality of teaching and learning in the intermediate term. For this impact to be realized, however, certain refinements will be critical.

Dr. Leithwood emphasized this statement by recommending that the following stimulators of student learning be noted and become the focus in the professional learning communities participants in the project are establishing in their schools:

- The school has a strong academic press.
- Everyone on staff believes each staff member has a responsibility for the disciplinary climate in the school (a large variable in its influence).
- Teachers, parents, and students trust one another.
- Focused instruction is evident in classrooms, with teachers being attentive to student activity (students are on-task).
- There is a strong sense of efficacy on the part of teachers in terms of their instructional ability and on the part of principals in terms of the impact they have collectively.

August 2006 – Carmel Crevola Presents

***Breakthrough: Redesigning Classroom Instruction to Transform Learning* DVD and Facilitator's Guide**

Bev Miller, LSA Steering Committee
Aarthi Vig, Instructional Leader, CSC

The DVD and facilitator's guide for the Carmel Crevola workshop are additions to the package distributed to all participants at the August 2006 symposium (containing DVDs and guides for presentations made in April and August 2005 and in January and June 2006). The formats of the Crevola DVD and facilitator's guide are identical to those produced in the earlier edition. The guide provides material for a full day's workshop, but

there is also the option of selecting specific segments that contain the main ideas in *Breakthrough*. These include Guiding Principles, *Breakthrough* Framework, Moral Purpose, Personalization, Precision, and Professional Learning.

Bev Miller walked participants through the facilitator's guide and Aarthi Vig demonstrated how to navigate the DVD as well as providing information on how to access the material on the web.

Learning Mathematics for Teaching

Mary Lou Kestell, Student Achievement Officer, LNS

Kathy Kubota-Zarivnij, Student Achievement Officer, LNS

The two presenters guided participants through activities, demonstrations, and explanations that focused on mathematics instruction and teacher training. They emphasized the importance of activating prior learning, providing opportunities for students to talk to one another, encouraging students to solve problems in a variety of ways, and learning the skill of being able to make sense of students' thinking. The presenters also provided participants with a complete package of overheads to accompany their presentation.

Their presentation comprised the following topics:

- What is the Focus of Job-Embedded Learning? *Mathematics for Teaching* (Dr. Deborah Loewenberg Ball, November 2005 webcast)
- What Do Teachers Need to Know and Be Able to Do Mathematically?
- Let's Do Math as a Teacher (samples of tasks)
- What Does Differentiated Math Knowledge Look Like?
- How Will Elementary Teachers and School Curriculum Leaders Learn *Mathematics for Teaching*?
- What Has Been the Process for Moving from Professional Development to Professional Learning?
- How Is LNS Professional Learning Continuing?
- Examples of Professional Learning (teacher inquiry/study, co-teaching, coaching)
- Most Effective Professional Learning – Job-Embedded
- Professional Learning Opportunities for *Mathematics for Teaching*
- Suggestions for Learning *Mathematics for Teaching* (advice for colleagues and teachers)

The presenters finished by encouraging participants to contact Student Achievement Officers at LNS for additional assistance. The contacts are as follows:

marylou.kestell@ontario.ca

kathryn.kubota-zarivnij@ontario.ca

sonja.karsh@ontario.ca

joyce.tonner@ontario.ca

**Closing Address: The Honourable James K. Bartleman
Lieutenant Governor, Province of Ontario**

The Honourable James Bartleman began by stating that the role of principal has changed since he was a student. At that time, the primary role of the principal was to inflict discipline in a harsh manner. In fulfilling this task, the principal received full community support.

James Bartleman himself became a high school teacher in 1963. He taught in Lambton County and Europe before moving on to his career as a diplomat, advisor to government leaders, and now Lieutenant Governor. However, throughout his career, he has never forgotten teaching.

As Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Bartleman has adopted three causes, each one the result of personal experiences in his younger years. These three causes are anti-racism, mental health, and the well-being of Aboriginal youth.

He spoke of his mother and father, whose interracial marriage at ages 14 and 18 respectively led to his mother's expulsion from the reservation. Their lack of education meant a life of basic hard labour to provide food, clothing, and housing for their four children. They experienced poverty and discrimination, for it was a racist society at that time, one that placed Japanese Canadians in internment camps, turned away Jews seeking asylum during World War II, and withheld the vote from Aboriginal people until 1960.

Mr. Bartleman's escape from this existence was the village library, where he was transported into another world, one where he saw that other futures were possible. There he developed a love of reading. As a result, his marks in school improved and he was able to take advantage of opportunities as they arose.

Over the years, the world opened up for him. He has lived on six continents and learned much from his experiences in these places. He developed an appreciation for the importance of literacy and education and came to understand that we can do a lot more for those who fall through the cracks.

On his return to Ontario, Mr. Bartleman noted that many positive changes had occurred in the southern regions of the province, but in northern Ontario, he observed a huge portion of our society languishing in poor third-world conditions. He saw young people giving up and killing themselves due to a lack of hope. A contributing factor to this tragic situation was that they lacked the ability to read and write and therefore lacked the skills to cope.

He pointed out that the Aboriginal population in much of Ontario is experiencing both a significant growth and a migration from reservations to the cities, but in the north,

although a similar growth in population is taking place, the movement to the cities is not occurring. In addition, unemployment is huge in the northern communities; thus, Aboriginal peoples have little or nothing to do. While their cultural and religious traditions could help them deal with the bleakness of their situation, there is a Christian element in Aboriginal communities that is very reluctant to blend Christian and Native customs.

The situation for the youth in these communities is anything but positive. The poverty of their existence means that they are often hungry. Moreover, in school, they are far behind their counterparts in the south. Statistics indicate that 50% are labelled 'special needs,' 90% are two years behind non-Native students, and 70% drop out of high school.

The problem stems in part from the lack of proper organization and money management in the educational system. For example, the federal government is responsible for education; the provincial government is responsible for testing; and the Aboriginal communities are responsible for delivery. Also, when crises occur, money is often diverted from education to deal with the crises.

In response to these problems, the Lieutenant Governor has made a commitment to using the weight of his position to bring the human face of Aboriginal people to the public. His goal is to mobilize civil society to assist the third-world country that exists within Canada, and his focus in this endeavour is Native youth.

The first initiative he introduced involved launching a book drive to help establish libraries in Aboriginal communities. He also strove to break down stereotypical images by twinning Native with non-Native schools. Next came the establishment of summer literacy camps for at-risk students. These camps, now called Fun Reading Camps, attracted 2,000 students last year and will host 3,000 students this coming summer. Another project is the Young Readers' Program, which has a membership of 5,000 youth in the fly-in communities situated in the Far North. These groups receive new books four times a year as part of this program, and members have taken on the task of producing their own newspaper. Finally, there is currently a book drive in progress, the goal being to collect 150,000 books for Aboriginal children and adolescents. Hopes are that this will become an annual event.

Closing: Nil Parent, ADFO

Nil Parent thanked the participants for their attendance, asked them to submit their completed evaluation forms, and announced the date of the next symposium. It will take place **May 4, 2007** at the Renaissance Hotel in Toronto.