

# DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

## MISA FINAL REPORT IMPROVING READING & WRITING THROUGH THE USE OF SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Supported by Barrie Region MISA  
Professional Network Centre

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### PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND PEDAGOGICALLY SOUND PRACTICE LEADS TO PROMOTION OF INCREASED LITERACY SKILLS

In September of 2006, two schools within the same family of schools in the Durham District School Board began working together to consolidate and apply pedagogically sound practices based on previous Ministry trainings. Their goal was to increase student achievement in Literacy. Both schools are located in similar geographic and economic areas and deal with high student needs. In order to begin, both schools identified steps that needed to be taken:

1. use student assessment data to measure and monitor progress
2. consistently and effectively use scaffolded model in reading and writing
3. Encourage reflective practice
4. Improve student achievement in reading and writing as well as student attitudes



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#### Professional Materials

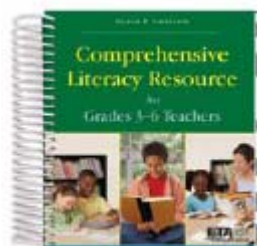
- Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading K-3
- Guide to Effective Instruction in Literacy 4-6
- Debbie Miller's *Reading With Meaning*
- Harvey and Goudvis' *Strategies That Work*
- Fountas and Pinnell's *Guiding Readers and Writers*
- Miriam Trehearne's *K, 1/2 and 3-6 Literacy Resources*

### PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Professional Learning Communities developed on each staff: one for primary and one for junior. These PLC's agreed to meet once a month. The purpose of the monthly meeting would be to engage in professional dialogue to encourage greater reflective practice. The teachers would review and discuss Ministry guides

and other professional materials already read (Debbie Miller, Harvey and Goudvis, Miriam Trehearne) and share successes in the application of comprehensive literacy strategies. Ultimately these discussions would revolve around the achievement results of particular students based on the collected assessment

data. The teachers would narrow their focus onto one or two students and zero in on specific strategies to target the needs.



## COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY

The two staffs first came together to discuss the Durham District School Board's Literacy profile and the components of a comprehensive Literacy program. Primary and junior divisions worked separately to determine how to ensure that each of the components: read alouds, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading as well as modeled writing, interactive writing, guided writing and independent writing were incorporated cross curricularly and in an effective manner at each grade level. The examination and analysis of several sample timetables enabled the staffs to begin with the creation of common grade or division day plans which would accommodate and reflect all of the components of a comprehensive literacy program.



## THE BOOK ROOMS



Teachers at each staff began working collaboratively to revisit, inventory and critically analyze their school book rooms in order to gain a deeper understanding of the materials already there to support them. There was a lot of talk and joint planning in these book rooms as some teachers began to realize the full potential of the resources contained within. The idea that shared reading materials and guided reading materials need not fit into a particular theme or curriculum area became more evident as the discussions focused on what materials would support the teaching and learning of specific skills. Primary teachers visited junior bookrooms and vice versa to learn the full range available to support their particular students' needs. Materials were reorganized (some even distributed to classroom libraries), sign out systems reviewed and additional materials ordered to augment the number of lower level texts. Overall there were some pleasant discoveries and rich dialogue. For future purchases, a plan was put into place which would take into consideration the school plan as well as student needs, making everyone accountable for such expenditures.

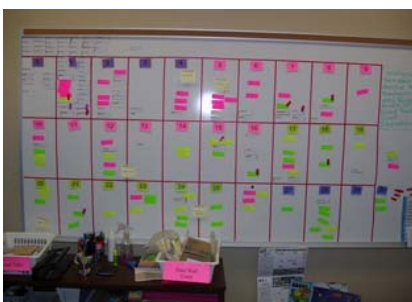
## THE LEVELING OF CLASSROOM MATERIALS

The next step was to ensure that each classroom in both primary and junior had leveled texts for independent reading materials. Using Fountas and Pinnells reference as a guide the teachers worked together to ensure that independent reading materials in each classroom were leveled and organized. Teachers, administration and Literacy Coaches organized after school “leveling parties” and went from classroom to classroom leveling and organizing texts of all types. Some resources from the book rooms and library were decentralized and redistributed to classrooms and teachers also pooled their own resources to ensure that each classroom had an adequate amount of leveled texts for independent reading. Purchases were made to begin to fill the gaps



Grade six Teacher’s first attempt at setting up a leveled classroom library

## THE CREATION OR UPDATING OF DATA WALLS



Primary and junior data walls



The creation of the data walls came next. White boards were ordered—one for primary and one for junior. These white boards would become the center of discussions, so they were hung in prominent places in the primary and junior bookrooms. One PLC was actually dedicated to the physical set up of the data walls and stimulated much professional dialogue. Coloured labels and magnets were used to record and track student data from running records and CASI. Each student in primary was assigned a different coloured label according to his/her grade. On the label there was room for the student’s name at the top and the first initials from each month beginning and ending with June at the bottom in order to record running record level. The colours on the data wall corresponded with the

appropriate reading levels for each grade (eg. K– 0-5), so it became quickly apparent if a student was not where he/she should be. Similarly, each junior grade was assigned a specific coloured label and each student had four labels for each of the four achievement chart categories. The student’s name went on the top and the terms across the bottom—fall, winter spring. The junior data wall revealed much information about students overall abilities and skills in each of the four achievement chart categories and allowed teachers to target certain skills using specific strategies. Once again the discussion revolved around how to explicitly teach the skills and strategies using the scaffolded model and what materials could be used to support that.

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## Our Journey Together

Throughout our time together the teachers became more self reflective. Discussions centered around student achievement and how to improve it. Their own limitations in thinking there was nothing they could do evolved into greater and more frequent attempts at working together to plan what to do next. Reference was constantly made to professional resources as teachers shared both their successes and failed attempts. It was evident that their collaboration and collegiality was strengthened among other things:

*“I valued the time and focus of our PLC. The “community” direction helped to synthesize approaches as well as drive instruction.”*

*“What was most valuable was getting together to share ideas and to share ideas and create consistency in planning. Working out problems and concerns together made teaching so much easier.”*

*“The professional dialogue around assessment practices has never happened here before. It was extremely valuable. It’s nice to see kids improving (finally!)”*

## WHAT THE DATA REVEALED

At the start of the MISA project teachers were asked to assign themselves a level to rate their competency in each of the following areas:

- Use assessment data to measure and monitor progress
- Engage in reflective practice
- Focus discussion on the quality of teaching and learning
- Increase students’ achievement in reading and writing
- Improve students’ attitudes in these subject areas
- Consistently and effectively use specific instructional approaches

At the start, 96% of the assigned levels were 1’s and 2’s. By the end of the project 87% were 3’s and 4’s.

There was a noticeable improvement in student achievement across both divisions and at both schools as indicated by the following results:

	School A	School A		School B	School B	
	At grade level	At grade level	% who improved	At grade level	At grade level	% who improved
<b>Grade 1</b>	27%	92%	77%	11%	44%	29%
<b>Grade 2</b>	39%	54%	100%	24%	44%	56%
<b>Grade 3</b>	53%	60%	96%	20%	29%	56%
<b>Grade 4</b>	27%	50%	73%	15%	47%	40%
<b>Grade 5</b>	45%	74%	58%	21%	26%	7%
<b>Grade 6</b>	9%	26%	90%	21%	44%	18%