

Message from the CODE Special Education Project Co-Chairs

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Co-Chairs, CODE Special Education Leadership Team

As Co-chairs of the CODE Special Education Project, we would like to welcome you to the first edition of the 2009–2010 CODE Chronicles. We are very excited about continuing to share and mobilize knowledge through this electronic journal process. We encourage you to share your special education program and service initiatives through this journal. Please contact one of us if you have an article to share. The following provides an update of the CODE Special Education Project activities.

2008–2009 CODE Special Education Project Activities

During the 2008–2009 school year, the CODE Special Education Leadership Team was committed to supporting district school boards in maintaining the momentum that had been built during the first three years of the project. The team identified the need to mobilize knowledge across the province and developed a knowledge transfer and exchange agenda that included the following activities:

- CODE Education for All Leadership Summit – 600 delegates participated in two days of intensive discussion and reflection.
- CODE Chronicles – Four editions featuring articles written by district school board staff are available from the www.ontariodirectors.ca website.
- PD funding – Up to \$10,000 per board was provided to support Special Education PD-day activities.
- Webinars – Four sessions addressing the theme of leadership in special education were developed and are available from the www.ontariodirectors.ca website.
- Parent Engagement Tool – Developed and distributed to all district school boards.
- Initiation of Essential for Some, Good for All Research Project – Involved ten boards in partnership with Andy Hargreaves and Henry Braun from Boston College and the CODE Special Education Leadership Team

2009–2010 CODE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROJECT ACTIVITIES

CODE remains committed to supporting ongoing improvement in district school boards' special education program and service delivery. The following provides a brief overview of activities planned by the CODE Special Education Leadership Team for the 2009–2010 school year. The team's plan includes providing support based upon the activities of the first four years of the project, as well as the Special Education Early Learning and Intervention Project funded through the Special Education Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The CODE Special Education Project Leadership Team will continue to support knowledge mobilization through the following activities.

- CODE Chronicles – Four theme-based editions are planned. Boards are encouraged to submit articles for publication.
- Special Education Leadership Summit DVD and Study Guide
- Essential for Some, Good for All Research Project – Ten boards and CODE Special Education Leadership Team will begin Year One of the two-year study.
- CODE/HP Partnership Project – The CODE Special Education Leadership Team, in partnership with Hewlett-Packard (Canada) Co. and two boards, will explore capacity-building strategies related to the use of assistive technology.
- Provincial, national, and international articles and presentations – This year marks the fourth year of sharing project information through organizations such as NSDC, CEC, and CASE.

2009–2010 SPECIAL EDUCATION EARLY LEARNING AND INTERVENTION PROJECT

The Special Education Branch of the Ministry of Education has provided funding for the 2009–2010 school year to support the development and implementation of effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for all students in JK–Grade 1.

Project Description

1. Ontario Context

- The project aligns with the goals of the Ontario Ministry of Education: improved student achievement; reduced gaps in student achievement; and increased public confidence in, and support for, public education.
- The project supports recommendations by Dr. Charles Pascal in his report *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* (esp. "Improved monitoring, evaluation, and public reporting on early learning outcomes").
- The project builds on the CODE Special Education Project (2005–2009), which focused on the implementation of the recommendations of *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6*. The CODE project emphasized literacy and

numeracy instructional strategies to improve student achievement for all students, and in particular, for students with special education needs.

2. Project Goals

- Support implementation of effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for all students in JK–Grade 1.
- Identify existing effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.

- Share, through leadership networks, effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.
- Build teacher and school board capacity to implement effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.
- Develop a monitoring tool to support boards in implementing effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.

3. The Process

- CODE will provide up to \$10,000 in approved funding to all interested school boards.
- CODE will provide additional funding to selected lead school boards on a regional basis.

4. Evaluation

CODE will identify an independent evaluator to:

- participate in the development of an assessment tool for school boards to measure implementation of evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1; and
- report on:
 - the CODE process used to accomplish the goals of the project; and
 - student, parent, and system outcomes as per the goals of the project.

Student Outcomes:

Tools will measure student numeracy, literacy, and social development.

Parent Outcomes:

Process will include assessment of parent confidence.

System Outcomes:

Boards will self-report, based on the framework.

5. Deliverables

- Regional (English and French) findings of evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.
- Tool for board implementation of evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.
- Sharing of the deliverables locally, regionally, and provincially, including posting on the CODE website.
- Evaluator's report of:
 - the CODE process used to accomplish the goals of the project; and
 - student, parent, and system outcomes as per the goals of the project.

6. Project Elements

- The elements that will be addressed include:
 - Leadership
 - Parental/family involvement
 - System processes
 - Assessment/tests
 - Use of data
 - Building capacity
 - Knowledge mobilization



Recent attendees at the London Region RSEC Meeting at Oakwood Inn in Grand Bend learned about the new CODE initiatives from Project Chairs John Fauteux and Michelle Forge.

Thanks to funding and support from the Ontario Ministry of Education, the CODE Special Education Project has provided leadership to all Ontario district school boards. With that support, district school boards have made significant gains in transforming special education programs and services in Ontario, as evidenced by the improved achievement of students with special education needs. The CODE project will continue to provide support to ensure that the knowledge gained during the past four years continues to generate improved learning for both staff and students in our province.

For further information on any of the CODE Special Education Project activities, please contact the Co-Chairs of the Leadership Team:

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Reflections on Implementing Change "By the Book": Expanding Our Implementation of the CODE Project during 2007–2008

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Background

Our CODE project focused on the achievement of our students with special education needs in the area of literacy and numeracy. Professional learning communities (PLC) were assembled at each elementary school, with the school principal, a primary and junior teacher representative, a special education teacher, and the early literacy specialist as the "lead learners" within each school site. Guided by an action research focus, each

« Reflections on Implementing Change, continued

PLC formed a response to the question, "In what other ways can we support students with special education needs in the areas of literacy and numeracy?" Our CODE project participants quickly developed understandings that aligned with key beliefs identified within *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6*, specifically:

- All students can succeed;
- Each child has his or her own unique patterns of learning;
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.

Rethinking Our Project Approach

We made significant gains in our initial project approach by expanding each school's understanding of how to ensure that Individual Education Plans were followed by appropriate adjustments to classroom practice. This dialogue soon developed into a larger professional discussion about the personalization of instruction for all learners. As well, our project promoted a change in the culture of practice at each school. The CODE project asked participants to consider role definitions and role distinctions among professionals, as well as school-based processes that enhanced how each site could share expertise about meeting the learning needs of a wide variety of students.



What our project approach overlooked was the contribution and input that teachers from the Intermediate division—Grades 7 and 8—could readily provide and, in general, the focus for inquiry that framed the work of the site-based PLCs. The project management team realized that we interpreted the opportunity presented by Education for All too narrowly. Indeed, our interpretation was literally "by the book"; that is, we believed that the subtitle of the Expert Panel Report (Kindergarten to Grade 6) was the limit for discussing the renewal and revitalization of our approach for addressing learner variance within our classrooms.

For us, the next critical step was to ensure that our project was broader in scope, such that Grades 7 and 8 teachers were included in the CODE discussions as full participants in the professional learning community's dialogue at each school site. The remainder of this reflection outlines our response to what Fullan (2005) describes as technical challenges and adaptive challenges associated with rethinking our project approach.

Adaptive and Technical Challenges

The type of work that now stood before the project management team related to "adaptive challenges." According to Fullan, "adaptive challenges concern problems whose solutions are not known" and where "solutions lie outside the current way of operating." Our teachers in Grades 7 and 8 reflect what Hargreaves (1993) characterizes as a "subject-matter orientation" that is reinforced by the very nature of the Intermediate curriculum and by some school-based structures such as the "rotary" system (where students receive instruction by moving from one teacher to another during a day divided into periods of instruction). From the project management team's perspective, our corresponding challenge was to connect professionals who were immersed in a professional culture defined by their subject specialization with the work of professional learning communities that had developed a dialogue shaped by the key learnings arising from Education for All which emphasized student-centred pedagogy rather than program-centred pedagogy.

In addition to adaptive challenges, our project team also faced what Fullan termed "technical challenges." Fullan reminds us that technical challenges equate to problem solving "that can be addressed through current knowledge or know-how." In this case, the project management team needed to identify how we could adjust our implementation model to be more inclusive of all classroom professionals from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

Our Response to the Adaptive Challenges

Our response to the adaptive challenge was to recognize the common ground between the professional cultures that existed within our schools, acknowledging that one program area had a long-standing subject-matter orientation by virtue of the curriculum and of institutional practices relating to program delivery. Our project management team set about to define a common culture of practice by drawing strong parallels between Education for All and the provincial Student Success initiative which has a shared emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction was our bridge between the initial dialogue already under way within professional learning communities and Intermediate division colleagues with teaching assignments in Grades 7 and 8.

The purpose of our first meeting with representatives of the various school-based PLCs was to make visible differentiated instruction in all types of instructional settings, including Intermediate division programs and rotary-style structures. Feedback from our Intermediate teachers indicated that this approach featured "good ideas to help bring the Intermediates on board" and that emphasizing differentiated instruction "helped the Grade 7 and 8 [teachers] reach the level of understanding of CODE." An Intermediate teacher commented after this initial meeting that "Intermediate CODE teachers need to get together to share and develop strategies for their classroom." A careful selection of resources that reinforced a focus on effective practice through differentiated instruction allowed for extension of our system-level project meetings to the PLC level with teachers from all program divisions. Resources authored by Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999 and 2001) were particularly valuable for their examples from the "middle grades," which resonated with Grade 7 and 8 teachers.

Our Response to the Technical Challenges

The project management team referenced Fullan, reminding us that transforming our behaviours and beliefs is based on progressive interaction that includes having ongoing

access to knowledge and building a "cumulative coherence." Having initiated a response that we believed would address the adaptive challenges defined by differences in school-based instructional cultures, the project management team recognized that overcoming remaining technical challenges was critical to supporting a transformation. We saw this as a convergence of our focus on differentiated instruction with a second focus on professional learning, which we came to view as "differentiated staff development." Our project management team learned that differentiated staff development featured the components that classroom professionals found valuable for nurturing growth in their practice. Indeed, one of the project participants with an Intermediate division assignment summarized what she saw as valuable: "(It was) time to work together that allowed us to get into things more deeply. The resources also helped when we looked at who our students were and what we could do to make them more successful."

CODE project funds provided release time for PLC meetings that included teachers from the Intermediate division. This aspect was valued by all participants, as evidenced by feedback received by the project team and by participants' comments in structured interviews conducted following the project. Project participants also valued the purchase of resources by in-school support teams to support the personalization of instruction. As one participant noted: "We could pick what would work for our students, not just what was valued in other schools."

These components were combined with a needs analysis form that the project management team designed to link the expertise of board consultants with the needs of each in-school support team. The survey asked, "How can the central CODE team assist you at your next CODE in-school meeting?" It is interesting to note that among the elements found within Education for All, the top four choices of school-based teachers included differentiated instruction and class profiles.

Lessons Learned

Our project management team and our in-school support teams have learned that the adage "Never judge a book by its cover" applies to our CODE experience. Our initial project design had overlooked the wider application of the Expert Panel Report to all grades, simply because the subtitle of the report identified its focus as "Kindergarten to Grade 6." Using the lens of effective practice and improved student achievement for all learners allowed us to approach the content of Education for All in a manner that led to a transformation in how we teach all learners within our elementary schools. ◆

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Premier Assistive Technology and the OSSLT

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During the fall/winter of 2007–2008, a pilot project was initiated to determine whether using the Premier Literacy Suite software would improve first-time-eligible students' success rate on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

Historically, a high percentage of special-needs students had not been successful on the OSSLT. In particular, students identified with a Learning Disability (LD) or a Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) presented with the greatest risk of failure. Research indicated that this lack of success was primarily due to cognitive issues associated with LD and MID, which manifest themselves as a variety of print-related disabilities such as reading, processing, and comprehending written text.

The target population consisted of 16 students, 11 identified as LD and 6 diagnosed as MID. A detailed review of all historical assessment data and current level of performance was completed for each student in order to create a student profile. Based on this data, it was determined that these students would have a very difficult time succeeding on the OSSLT without some support.

Analysis of the students' profiles showed weaknesses in reading comprehension and written language. The team decided to focus on reading comprehension, and it was determined that implementing text-to-speech software would permit students to access information and enhance their comprehension. A team was set up to train and support the students. The team consisted of three teachers from the Special Education department, two teachers from the Canadian and World Studies department, a technology resource teacher, and the area special services coordinator. The team determined that the Premier Literacy Suite software