

# Four Questions to Focus, Change, and Transition Teacher Instructional Practice to Increase Student Achievement

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Alvin Toffler once wrote: *“Our moral responsibility is not to stop the future, but to shape it... to channel our destiny in humane directions and to ease the trauma of transition.”* Changes in board reporting requirements to the Ministry of Education, like MISA, business intelligence tools (such as COGNOS) to extrapolate data on student achievement, and the Ontario curriculum have created the capacity to focus schools to transition teachers and to change instructional practice to increase student achievement.

One of the roles of the supervisory officer is to develop a systematic evaluation of school effectiveness and to use and collect data to understand and assess the strengths and weaknesses of schools. This allows the superintendent and principals to examine the outcomes of a school self-review with provincial and other assessments. By developing four focus questions for school visits, we ensure that staff analyze data to develop changes and implement strategies to modify instructional practice.

**Q1: What areas are you looking at with your school teams, and what improvement strategies could enhance student achievement? Provide evidence to show this relationship.**

The first question allows principals to examine instructional methods such as differentiated instruction and differentiated assessment, along with working with staff to determine whether the strategies currently being used in the classroom are moving students forward. This question enables the school staff to examine if adequate resources exist in areas such as the library or whether additional resources, such as math manipulatives, are needed.

**Q2: From examining your EQAO results, report card data, DRA, CASI, and information on individual students, how have your school teams identified problem areas in instruction and adjusted student instruction?**

The second question allows teachers to identify the neediest students in the class or division and design specific professional development for teachers in the use of high-yield strategies with those identified students. Various data banks can be used to identify trends over time and shortfalls in student achievement. The collection of the various data banks enables teachers to examine discrepancies between classroom assessments and provincial assessments such as EQAO and CASI. These types of comparisons can be used to address concerns related to the assessment and learning. This approach also ensures that staff understand that there must be a correlation between reporting to parents on the provincial report card and data such as EQAO.

**Q3: From the review of individual scores from the EQAO results, how do these results compare to the first or second term report card results for those students in reading, writing, and mathematics? What adjustments to instructional strategies have been made if you see students at the same levels? Provide evidence of adjustments to instructional strategies to meet student needs.**

The third question enables principals and teachers to use the data warehouse to develop a focus on dialogue that examines the need for accurate assessments as well as authentic assessment practices by teachers in the classroom and by division. In addition, it targets students that are not improving with additional supports using strategies from documents such as Education for All, with a focus on differentiated instruction. A transition for teacher adjustment is developed by teachers to adjust day books, long-range plans, and school timetables to meet student and teacher needs.

**Q4: As a school principal, how are you ensuring that teachers have regular opportunities to access and use data individually and in teams to review and gauge student learning and alter their instructional practices to increase student achievement? Provide evidence of these opportunities.**

The final question ensures that the school principal becomes the instructional leader in the school and uses the data during individual and staff meetings to discuss the specific use of data. It also enables teachers to provide evidence to explain how students have moved along the achievement continuum and what strategies are used in the classroom to move students.

The question allows principals the ability to focus on specific areas such as student IEPs so that they reflect individual student needs, especially in the area of performance tasks which are reflective of student's strengths and are designed with individual learning styles in mind. It also develops a mindset for an entire school professional learning community discussion to build lateral and vertical capacity.

George Bernard Shaw wrote: *“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.”* The time has arrived where we can create the circumstances to change teacher instructional practices to increase student achievement, based on the foundations provided in the

Ontario Curriculum and the ability to access both provincial assessment data and other data from a school board data warehouse. ●

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## Vivre l'inclusion au cycle moyen

Cynthia Roveda, directrice de l'éducation  
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Le Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord a élaboré un projet « Vivre l'inclusion au cycle moyen ...vers la réussite de l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers » dans le but de :

- permettre à l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers d'améliorer son rendement en matière de littératie et de vivre des réussites à l'intérieur du modèle d'inclusion;
- permettre à l'enseignant d'améliorer ses pratiques par l'entremise de la pédagogie différenciée;
- permettre la collaboration des membres du personnel au sein d'une communauté d'apprentissage professionnel dans le but de discuter de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage des élèves pour ainsi assurer la réussite de chaque élève.



L'implantation du projet s'est échelonnée sur une période de trois ans impliquant dans un premier temps le cycle moyen de quatre écoles, suivi de quatre autres écoles lors de la deuxième année pour enfin se terminer dans la troisième année avec la mise en œuvre dans toutes les écoles élémentaires du Conseil. « C'est grâce au projet CODE que le Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord a pu mettre en œuvre les principes directeurs et les recommandations retenus par la Table ronde des

experts tels que prescrit dans le document L'éducation pour tous, » de dire la direction de l'éducation, Mme Cynthia Roveda.

En début de ce projet, il va sans dire que la communauté scolaire a vécu une déstabilisation venant remettre en question la pratique pédagogique traditionnelle fondée sur les programmes et visant à desservir l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers par l'entremise d'un retrait avec l'enseignante-ressource. C'est grâce à un plan stratégique de mise en œuvre impliquant des formations professionnelles, l'élaboration de profils d'élèves et de classe, l'achat de ressources, un accompagnement continu et de dialogues pédagogiques au sein de communautés d'apprentissage professionnelles, que le projet a vu le jour.

Le personnel scolaire s'est vu appuyer par des formations sur mesure au niveau de la littératie, de la différenciation pédagogique et de la création de profils d'élève et de classe venant révolutionner leur enseignement dorénavant axé sur la réussite de l'élève. L'appui de l'enseignante-ressource au sein de la salle de classe ordinaire fut non seulement dirigé pour l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers, mais également auprès de l'enseignante titulaire afin de faciliter la différenciation pédagogique et par le fait même, assurer la réussite de tous les élèves. « C'est par l'entremise d'une pédagogie différenciée que l'enseignant(e) s'est senti(e) outillé(e) pour accueillir en classe l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers. L'élève a pu développer des liens d'appartenance avec son groupe classe et vivre des réussites qui ont contribué à rehausser son estime de soi. » de dire Mme Cynthia Roveda.

Au début du projet, la création de profils fut élaborée à partir de quelques données rudimentaires qui se sont avérées peu valables pour ensuite évoluer vers des outils beaucoup plus fiables et précis permettant de créer une pratique uniforme au sein du Conseil et de dresser un profil plus complet de l'élève et de classe. L'analyse des données des profils d'entrée et de sortie des groupes cibles du cycle moyen a révélé qu'il y avait eu une amélioration marquée dans le rendement de la lecture de l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers, soit une hausse moyenne de cinq niveaux de lecture par année, et ce, selon le niveau de gradation du MEO. De plus, un sondage fut administré aux élèves et aux parents des élèves du groupe cible afin d'évaluer leur taux de satisfaction face au modèle d'inclusion. Les résultats démontrèrent que la majorité des parents et des élèves étaient très satisfaits des bienfaits de ce modèle. « Mon enfant se sent beaucoup plus accepté par les autres depuis qu'il vit l'inclusion. Il aime faire la même lecture que ses amis, car cela lui permet de pouvoir discuter avec eux par la suite et il ne se sent pas différent. » de dire un parent. C'est grâce à l'analyse des données consignées dans le profil que le personnel scolaire a pu suivre plus facilement le progrès de l'élève en vue de connaître son niveau de rendement et de réajuster son enseignement. « Un accompagnement continu auprès du personnel enseignant, le modelage des stratégies de littératie en salle de classe régulière, l'achat des ressources nivelées et la création de tâches modifiées sont venus faciliter l'inclusion de l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers » affirme une direction d'école.

L'implantation de communautés d'apprentissage professionnel par l'entremise d'un leadership collégial a aussi permis au personnel scolaire de progresser et d'apprendre à se percevoir comme un membre d'une équipe travaillant pour atteindre un but commun, soit la réussite de tous les élèves. Cette vision commune est venue non seulement créer un climat de confiance et d'appui au sein de la communauté scolaire, mais également établir une collaboration plus étroite entre le foyer et l'école pour ainsi assurer l'inclusion réussie de l'élève en salle de classe ordinaire.

L'inclusion de l'élève ayant des besoins particuliers a créé un rapprochement entre les Services pédagogiques et le Service à l'élève du Conseil créant ainsi, une nouvelle équipe de collaboration ayant une vision commune axée sur la réussite de l'élève. Toujours dans l'esprit d'améliorer le rendement de l'élève, le Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord s'est montré très avant-gardiste en équipant toutes ses classes du palier élémentaire avec des tableaux interactifs ayant pour effet de répondre davantage aux divers styles d'apprentissage des élèves et de renforcer leur motivation ainsi que leur participation. De plus, le Conseil a équipé ses écoles avec 50 logiciels de reconnaissance optique de car-

## « Vivre l'inclusion au cycle moyen, continued

actères par l'entremise d'une licence réseau, permettant ainsi aux élèves ayant des besoins particuliers d'apprendre de façon plus efficace et de développer leur autonomie.

C'est grâce au projet CODE que le Conseil a pu transformer son approche à l'égard des élèves en difficulté et de permettre à la majorité de ses élèves ayant des besoins particuliers de vivre l'inclusion. Le Conseil en est arrivé au constat que l'élève auparavant exclu, ne peut être accueilli que dans la mesure où les gens travaillent ensemble et peuvent compter les uns sur les autres pour trouver le soutien et conserver l'enthousiasme nécessaire. ●

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## Corrective Reading and Empower™

Mark Harper, Superintendent of Learning Services  
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With the benefit of CODE funding over the past three years, the WRDSB has invested in building the capacity of teachers to help struggling readers develop skills and strategies for reading. Two programs—Corrective Reading and Empower™—have been used in a coaching format to accomplish this goal.

In the first year of funding, we began with a small number of selected pilot sites and teachers. In the second and third years, we

built upon the reported successes of these programs and added sites and teachers. As a result, the programs grew out of the positive reputation that they gained with teachers, administrators, and parents and have become integrated into the work of the special education teachers at schools. This has served to build their sustainability in the system. In sum, over the past three years, 40 teachers have been trained in the fundamentals of the Empower program and more than 100 teachers have been trained in the Corrective Reading program.

Following the initial training for both programs, the teachers have had ongoing support and coaching in learning to deliver these programs to students. Coaches have shared their expertise with teachers by modelling teaching strategies and providing feedback to teachers after observing them deliver the program. Teachers reported that the coaching discussions and suggestions added to their knowledge and confidence in delivering the program. Ongoing support for teachers has been provided via the board's internal email system, enabling the sharing of questions, observations, frustrations, and successes amongst all teachers providing the two programs.

### Corrective Reading Program

The Corrective Reading (CR) program provides teachers with materials to teach children the building blocks of reading—namely, the connection between sounds and symbols. The program focuses primarily on decoding strategies and has a basic comprehension component. This program was put in place for students who have experienced the rich language approach of the primary years but who continue to have significant delays in their reading. It uses direct instruction in a prescriptive progression of skill acquisition to ensure mastery at each level. Students progress once they have mastered requisite skills for the next level.

The CR program was selected as an effective tool for special education teachers to use because there was a noted need to provide a common method for building capacity within the special education service delivery model in each school. In addition, from the outset there was an expectation of data collection. Student progress is tracked regularly via placement test results and running record levels. Pre- and post-test data allows all stakeholders to readily see the dramatic results of students making significant gains in their reading.

The CR initiative is now in its fourth year. Currently, it is self-sustaining with a high level of participation by schools due to the effective coaching model, the reliable positive results, and the fact that the use of ongoing data aligns with identified system goals. While the initial instructional materials were provided to schools, each school site now funds all consumable materials related to running the program.

### Empower™ Reading Program

The Empower™ program is a remedial reading program developed at The Hospital for Sick Children (HSC). This program is designed to address the core learning problems of struggling readers. Five specific, carefully sequenced decoding strategies and explicit metacognitive instructions are taught in order to give students the flexibility required in reading. The metacognitive strategies facilitate transfer of learning and ensure that each child takes ownership of the learned strategies in order to foster independence in reading text.

The Empower™ program is offered in a partnership with HSC. This partnership was pursued because the program was research-based, translating the knowledge gained from research into classroom practice. Given the parameters of the partnership, there is both rigorous training and coaching for teachers and ongoing data collection of students' progress. Teachers report dramatic changes not only in their students' reading ability but also in their sense of confidence. Teachers' self-reports indicated renewed enthusiasm and appreciation for teaching reading as well as significant strides in learning how to teach struggling readers effectively.

The change in students is evident very early in the delivery of the program. Classroom teachers comment on how eager the students are to participate in the regular classroom and to share their growing knowledge with their classmates. Teachers and school administrators ask to come and observe an Empower™ lesson in order to see what teachers are doing that could make such a significant overall change in such a short time. Likewise,

parents comment that their children are suddenly interested in reading books at home, sharing their new strategies and talking about the lesson of the day.

The Empower™ program is also in its fourth year. The partnership with HSC is continuing and we are growing the number of teachers who are trained each year and the number of sites where it is offered. We currently have teachers who operate as in-house master teachers, and our goal is to make our board self-sustaining in the training and coaching of teachers in the program next year.

The following quotes exemplify the power of these two programs for our students and teachers:

- "I want to learn how to read to get a job. Before, I didn't think that I could ever get a job. Now I know I can!" – CR student
- "That is the first time I've read in front of my class without my throat swelling up! And I knew I could do it! I love this program and now I really like to read!" – CR student
- "The Corrective Reading program is solid. It has made a difference in the lives of the kids in my class." – Classroom teacher
- "In a high needs school such as ours, this is the first time in their lives where students are experiencing a program that works for them!" – Principal of school using CR
- "Using the strategies makes you a good reader. You have to keep practising. Learning to read is like playing a sport. I feel awesome!" – Empower™ student
- "We learned a lot of strategies in reading this year. I learned that if you use good strategies and you put your mind to it, you can become an expert! For the first time I learned to believe in myself." – Empower™ student
- "I gave you a non-reader and you gave me back a child that enjoys reading chapter books." – Parent of an Empower™ student
- "Well, my daughter came home with these strategies and started using them all the time. I could hear her teaching her cousins to use them. I was surprised and thought to myself, 'how much more does she know.' I could hear her starting to use them for spelling and writing too. Learning to use those strategies built up her confidence. The turn around in her has been incredible. Truly, her self-esteem came up. She can do it now. She understands now." – Parent of an Empower™ student

These quotes testify to the impact for students of the Corrective Reading and Empower programs beyond instructional time. The experience of teaching with these programs has been not only empowering for students but also deeply inspirational for the teachers. ●

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### All Pathways Lead to Success

All Pathways Lead to Success is a DVD training tool for classroom teachers working with students with learning disabilities, to help teachers understand the importance of differentiating the process, product, and content for students who learn differently. The video demonstrates the impact on and challenges of a learning disability for students when they are presented with an English writing assignment, and showcases the assistive technology they use to demonstrate their learning.

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**Watch for the next issue of CODE Chronicles, coming May 2009!**