

« Nourishing, Sustaining, and Growing, continued

explicit about the use of the Continuous Cycle of Assessment for Learning so that all educators will have the same shared reference point);

- reviewing and refining the critical role of the in-school and out-of-school team as part of the continuous cycle of assessment, which includes both Special Education and Support Services staff.

Next Steps: Work with the classroom assessments and tracking of student results has yielded the realization that we need to go deeper. For example, overall scores for CASI, gathered in data cycles, are not sufficiently sensitive to individual student progress on discrete expectations which are focused on throughout the teaching learning pathway. This specificity is particularly critical for understanding growth of diverse learners. Recording and tracking overall aggregate scores over these learning cycles masks important data related to individual students' growth or gaps. Our local and central data gathering processes have been refined to respond to more specific data gathering as needed and, hence, more precise decisions on planned interventions and support.

f) SCHOOL/SYSTEM ORGANIZATION

Central to the success of the organizational structure are learning team processes incorporated into all capacity-building initiatives. Dufferin-Peel focused on Ministry initiatives and board directions responding to system needs through guidance, support, and direction in matters of student learning and achievement. Schools were engaged in innovation through research activities and inquiry projects to enhance the learning and achievement of all students, e.g., teacher moderation, the CASI project, (Junior); and the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills Project (ABLSS). Schools as communities of learners engaged in professional learning networks within focused school improvement planning. Differentiated supports, particularly with intensive support schools, targeted literacy and mathematical literacy, thus allowing us to provide more personalized and precise intervention.

Next Steps: The board is continuing to refine the critical role of the school team as part of the teaching learning assessment cycle, which includes Special Education and Support Services. Resource guides on the continuum of the team process for schools and teachers are currently under development, embedded within the School Effectiveness Framework initiative. The system focus on building networked communities of learning with a focus on all learners will deepen our work in student achievement and continue to narrow the gap.

g) COMMUNICATION

Dufferin-Peel enhanced collaborative relationships between parents, community, and educators through ongoing communication with the system and our community partnerships, including the Special Education Advisory Committee. Our messaging, system practice, and supports for all learners are rooted in a vision of integrated practice with the Program/Special Education and Support Services Departments at a system level aligned with Family of School and school-based practice.

Next Steps: Our Special Education and Support Services website, with integrated links to Ministry and board resources, is undergoing refinement and, when completed, will enhance the communication and resource support both to the system and to the greater community.

Future Directions and Next Steps

The CODE Special Education Project in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB has supported schools as they work to address the principles 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 (2005) and to assist schools to develop capacity-building projects to improve teachers' professional practice and to raise achievement for students with diverse learning needs.

DPCDSB affirms its support for greater integration between and amongst educators and support staff teaching diverse learners and will continue to focus on improving classroom practices and adopting processes for ensuring that assessment and instruction become increasingly precise and data-driven. Moving forward this year, the Board Plan to Improve Student Achievement: 2006–2009 authentically integrates key Special Education and Support Services and Program initiatives aligned to Dufferin-Peel's commitment to our Catholic faith, literacy, mathematical literacy, student success, and school improvement planning.



These initiatives are all offered within the context of Dufferin-Peel's Safe, Caring, Healthy, and Inclusive environments, reflecting the specific strategic goals outlined by the Ministry of Education: Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education (Winter 2008). ●

Comments about this article? Email sheila.mcwaters@dpcdsb.org or micki.Clemens@dpcdsb.org

Working and Learning Together

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Background

In Durham Catholic District School Board, many innovative CODE-sponsored Action Research Projects occurred in 2006. Schools involved in these projects noted increased teacher capacity as well as sustained gains in student learning. Unfortunately, projects were limited to just some schools, and several schools did not have the opportunity to

engage in in-depth, focused efforts to improve student learning based on Education for All and Differentiated Instruction.

The CODE project provided an opportunity to address gaps and inform Junior teachers and Program Support Teachers regarding best practices described in the Guides to Effective Instruction and Education for All. Classroom-based diagnostic assessments had been introduced in the Junior and Intermediate grades, and program support teachers articulated a need to understand these tools and the implications of their results.



There was also a desire for collaboration between the Program Services and Student Services Departments at the system level in order to best serve all students. The need for vertical alignment between schools and family of schools, within schools and at system level, was evident. Best practices from the CODE project schools, as well as lessons learned from schools implementing The Critical Learning Instructional Pathway, would be foundational in this initiative.

Project

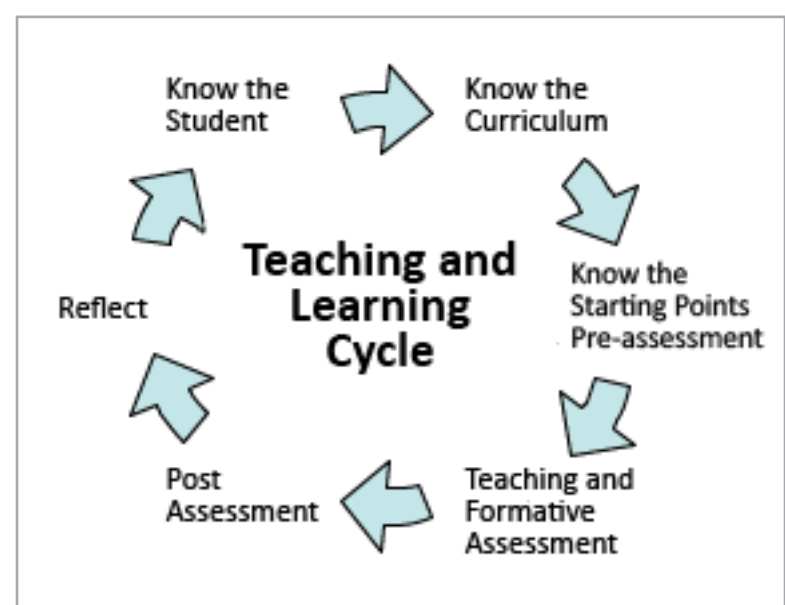
On October 7, 2007, this initiative began with a Professional Activity Day focused on building system capacity around Education for All. Teachers and support staff from both the elementary and secondary panels came together to hear Cindy Strickland deliver a foundational message regarding differentiated instruction. The day provided an inspirational jumping off point for the CODE project that would follow. This project brought together school teams of junior teachers as well as program support teachers. Approximately 220 teachers were involved in this initiative.

Guiding Principles

- Building professional learning communities
- Teacher inquiry
- Job-embedded learning
- Use of student data to inform teacher practice

Key Concepts

- Know the student – student profiles
- Know the curriculum
- Know the starting points – diagnostic data
- Implement effective teaching practices – exploring Education For All and the Guides to Effective Instruction (4–6)
- The teaching learning cycle would be the process through which these concepts were investigated.

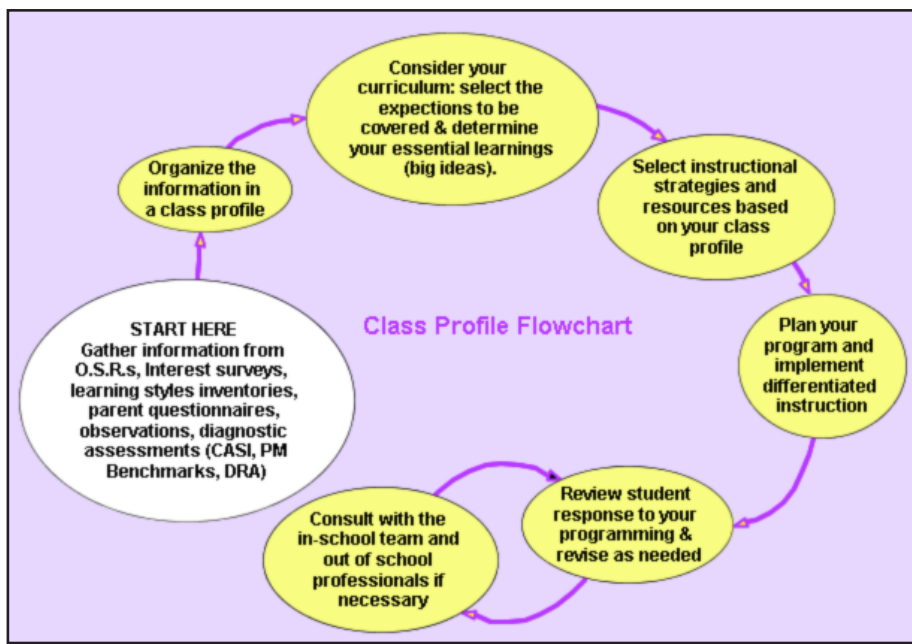


Our Journey

Each school assembled a team comprised of Junior teachers, program support teachers, and administrators. School teams met with other teams in the Family of Schools' structure to share and network. Teams examined diagnostic assessments, delved into curriculum expectations, explored best practices in the Guides to Effective Instruction and Education for All, and choose an area of focus. Some of the areas of focus were:

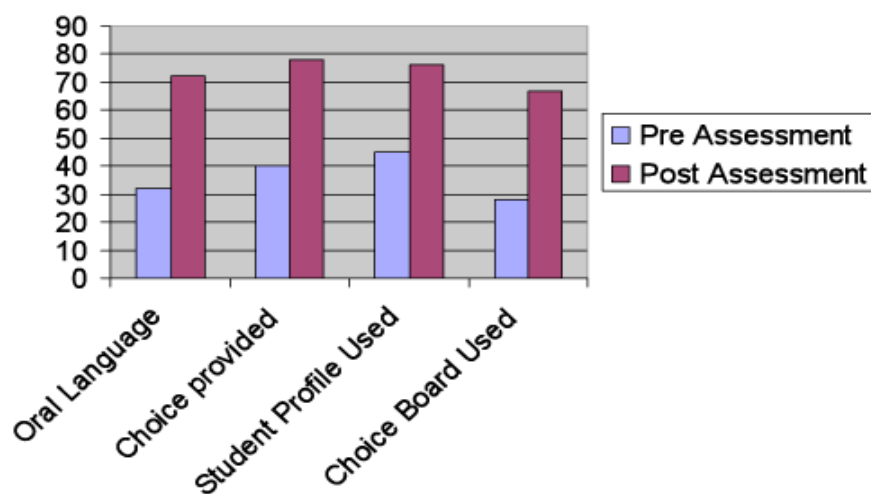
- Building Understanding of Differentiated Instruction: teachers deepened their understanding of differentiated instruction and identified powerful strategies for differentiating instruction; teachers planned and implemented one or two strategies; teachers met and discussed progress based on student work.
- Exploring Class Profiles: teachers developed or extended learning/class profiles; teachers focused on how these profiles would be used to plan for instruction.
- Discovering the Importance of Oral Communication: teachers used oral language and accountable talk to teach and assess student's knowledge of the curriculum; teachers collaboratively planned, implemented, and reflected on lessons.
- Creating a Multiple Intelligence Choice Board and Rubric: school teams designed a task, created an MI choice board and rubric, and implemented this activity; teacher teams examined student work based on the rubric.

« Working and Learning Together, continued



Evidence of Success

- Increased collaboration among program support teachers and junior teachers
- Increased support by program support teachers of research-based strategies
- Alignment of knowledge and practice between classroom teacher and program support teacher
- Clear evidence that the Ontario curriculum is forming the basis of instruction
- Continuous improvement in student achievement, as evident in CASI data
- Consistent implementation of high-yield strategies from Education For All and Guides to Effective Instruction
- Gains noted in teacher capacity in the areas of oral language, providing students choice in both the process and the product of learning, the use of class profiles, and the implementation of Choice Boards
- Continued collaboration between Program Services and Student Services Departments
- Increased principals' capacity as instructional leaders



Conclusion

A key component to the success of this project was the team approach to improved student learning. Professional learning communities focused on the success of all students by collaboratively navigating the data, investigating curriculum expectations, exploring best practices, and using assessment to drive instruction. The teams reflected and revised as necessary.

As a Catholic learning community, our overarching theme was the dignity and worth of all persons. This lens through which we approached our work truly guided us to keep each child's needs and successes in the forefront.

Future Directions

- Expand the initiative to all teachers in Durham Catholic District School Board
- Embed the spirit and principles of Education for All in the Critical Learning Instructional Pathway
- Continue to establish collaborative practices between Program Services and Student Services
- Move toward more consistency in the use of best practices system-wide
- Ensure all schools are actively using student learning styles and class profiles as part of universal design for learning

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Re-Culturing for Change

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The project was designed to address universal design, differentiated instruction, the use of assistive technology, assessment for learning, and the development of literacy. A systematic plan was put into place which allowed for regular focused meetings of the staff on a regular basis.

Teachers embraced the opportunity to grow together as a Catholic professional learning community (CPLC). They worked towards a shared vision. Following the development of learning profiles, they were able to collaboratively determine the next steps for the target students. Constructive criticism was no longer perceived as negative, and teachers worked closely with one another giving input, providing encouragement and challenging each other. Schools began looking for their own solutions rather than waiting for someone on the outside to parachute in and give them the answer. Staffs recognized that they were a team of experts and very often had the solutions within their reach. Their confidence in dealing with challenging situations increased tremendously.

Regular CPLCs also allowed the teachers to make connections and to have the rich dialogue to determine which job-embedded practices and strategies would be used between meetings. Much time was spent dialoguing on what worked, what didn't work, and what improvements could be made. Time was spent reflecting on teaching practices and their impact on student achievement.

The Education for All document was an invaluable resource for the project, and the schools did an in-depth study of this report. They studied the belief statements and made them a part of everything they did at the school. The belief statements were posted in a prominent place so they were visible to the staff, students, and parents. The schools lived and breathed the belief statements.

Educational assistants, learning resource teachers, and student support workers were integral parts of the CPLC. They were given training and worked closely with the teachers and students.

What were the results of this project? There were so many positive ones, and these far outweighed the negative. Teachers began to use and understand differentiated instruction effectively. Student achievement improved for all students and not only the target students. Students were more fully engaged in the learning process and the target groups showed less frustration. Organizational skills improved and negative behaviours decreased. Students increased their understanding of learning styles, including the target students, and they were able to advocate for themselves by recognizing what they needed to do and what could be done to support their learning. They appreciated the variety of choices they were given to complete their work and the opportunities for engagement. They also liked the fact that they were not withdrawn from the classroom. Assistive technology became a very important tool in the classroom.

As one teacher commented while reflecting at the end of the project, "I saw myself as a good teacher before this project. I am amazed at how much I have grown as a professional, and as a result, my students have improved. I can honestly say that I am a much better teacher. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this dynamic project."

In conclusion, this project allowed time for:

- Development of individual and classroom profiles
- Looking at students as our students rather than my students
- Reflective and professional dialogue at the school level
- Consolidation of many of the initiatives, with a focus on literacy
- Identification of our students who have the ability to achieve higher
- Development of regular Catholic professional learning communities (CPLCs)
- Tracking and monitoring of data of the target students
- Implementation of various job-embedded practices and strategies within the classroom, to benefit all students
- Increased knowledge of assistive technology and application software
- Increased professional development for both teachers and educational assistants
- Sharing of ideas and suggestions from one another
- Brainstorming to meet the challenges faced at a school level on a daily basis.
- Increased student awareness of their own learning styles
- Increased parental involvement in the learning process and understanding how they can better support their children at home
- Development of the foundations to allow for sustainability and capacity building

Comments about this article? Email mesposito@hscdsb.on.ca

The CODE Chronicle of the Northwest School Authorities

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Northern School Resource Alliance (NSRA)

The Northern School Resource Alliance is an educational consortium that supports isolated school boards, school authorities, principals, teachers, and community members in northwestern Ontario. The schools supported by the NSRA are isolated by distance, road and weather conditions. The member boards supported by CODE funding and the NSRA include the following:

- ATIKOKAN RCSSB, Atikokan, Ontario
- COLLINS DSA, Collins, Ontario
- CONNELL & PONSFORD DSA, Pickle Lake, Ontario
- CARAMAT DSA, Caramat, Ontario
- HORNEPAYNE RCSSB, Hornepayne, Ontario
- MINE CENTRE DSA, Mince Centre, Ontario
- NAKINA DSA, Nakina, Ontario
- NORTHERN DSA, Armstrong, Ontario
- RED LAKE RCSSB, Red Lake, Ontario
- UPSALA DSA, Upsala, Ontario