

**NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION
2011-2012**

**R C GARNETT DEMONSTRATION ELEMENTARY
#35 Langley**

Leadership Team

Chris Epting, Jean Garrod, Julia Henrey, Kathy Nelson, Amanda Slade

Contacts

Julia Henrey (jhenrey@sd35.bc.ca), Amanda Slade (aslade@sd35.bc.ca)

School Context/Community Involvement

This is the sixth year of operation for our school. We opened as a K-5 school with 290 students, and operated this year as a K-7 school with 9 portables. We have a strong community within our tiny catchment area: the neighbourhood is mostly fairly new houses with some rental accommodation. However, most of our families are settled here and there is fairly low transiency. The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) has historically been extremely supportive of our literacy goals, and individual parents often volunteer in our school to help support students' learning.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Will our grade 2/3 students develop stronger reading skills through participating in daily small group instruction targeted to reading needs, led by our grade 7 students, parents and teachers; and will our grade seven students develop a greater sense of social responsibility through leading small groups of grade 2/3 students with like reading needs in pre-planned reading activities?

Strategies

Teachers implemented a program called Walk to Read. The participating grade 2/3 teachers had seen a similar idea used as an intervention for early readers in the White River school district in Buckley, Washington. Building on the model they saw there, the Garnett team worked to respond to the different reading needs of their grade two and three students. The three primary teachers identified common learning needs in their students and grouped them accordingly. The students would then platoon to work on a different identified skill in reading for first half hour of every school day. While some students were working on accuracy, others were building fluency and expression and still yet others were working on being able to summarize the text. Based on their observation and common reading assessments, teachers would reassess learning needs approximately every six weeks. The teachers felt strongly that their weekly collaboration time allowed them to gain collegial support and greater understanding of their learners as a whole.

Initially, teachers planned to use SEA's, Resource teachers and parents to lead the groups, but quickly discovered that they would need a lot more group leaders in order to keep the groups small. They approached the grade 7 teachers, who reorganized their day plan around the Walk to Read program. Up to 15 students each day were needed from the two grade 7 classes, leaving fewer students in those classes. The grade 7 teachers used this time to teach guided reading to their students, taking advantage of the lower numbers and finding far fewer management issues.

The three primary teachers each planned the lessons for one of the three major groups of learners. Each teacher met with the leaders assigned to assist their learners and explained their packages and instructions at the beginning of each session. There was no need for the same parents or grade 7 students to participate each day as the written instructions and explanations were enough for leaders to know how to guide the students. The grade 3 students then "Walked to Read", meaning they literally went to different places in the school to work with their leader. We have two large open atriums that accommodate several groups, and have tables and chairs available. The classroom teachers, parents, grandparents and resource teacher generally used the tables, but the grade 7 students were happy to meet with their group on the floor.

NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION 2011-2012

Students also used the available classrooms. Teachers assigned the neediest group of readers with the most expert leader –often being the resource teacher or themselves.

Some of the activities the grade 3 teachers planned included sight word hopscotch and sight word bingo, games to distinguish vowel sounds, inferencing bags and work using wordless picture books, using the context of a sentence to accurately decode words, syllable work to help students chunk words, readers theatre and games to read with emotion to work on expression, and work to respond to text both written and orally.

School Findings

Grade 3 reading

	NY	A	M	E
Fall 2011	4	7	6	5
Spring 2012	3	3	9	9

The impact on the grade 7's social responsibility is harder to measure. However, we saw some tremendous growth in individual students. One boy who began his grade 7 year unwilling to make eye contact with teachers or peers started with a buddy, and gradually gained the confidence to lead his own group. Some of our strong grade 7 students were able to ask strong questions and guide the learning of the younger students in very impressive ways that they had practiced in their own literature circle discussions in grade 7. The primary teachers noticed some strong skills the grade sevens used to help the younger students. Often, they held the students accountable to participate and contribute to discussions. They helped solve turn taking problems and worked to lead the students to further learning. By the end of the year, all grade 7's had participated many times (although some required a lot of supervision) and many reflected that it was a very rewarding experience for them.

School Plans for 2012-2013

Although all members of the team will not be at our school 2012-13, the grade 3 teachers plan to continue the Walk to Read program in some form. However, we have the added complication of being reconfigured to a K-5 school next year, and so will lose the benefit of having grade 7 students who are able to lead groups where grade 5 students may not have either the reading skills or the social skills to do this with their peers who are only two years younger. Teachers leaving R.C. Garnett plan to continue walk to read in their new K-7 school. One other school in Langley plans to implement a Walk To Read program based on what they observed at R.C. Garnett, however, they are interested in doing it in French.

Reflections, Advice

This program worked for us because we had a very organized grade 3 team of teachers who creatively found some common planning time by finding a 30 minute DVD to supplement curricular outcomes once a week, and while the students were watching, could take some time to plan the weeks activities and groupings. It also relied on the grade 7 teachers also using small group instruction in their classrooms so that they could release various numbers of students to be group leaders, and on the whole team of teachers being flexible. Contributing to this program was also the support of the resource teacher participating and numerous parents and grandparents. We feel having it run at the start of the day contributed to family participation. The planning teachers discovered that a manageable way to write up instructions was to write them for the week and then vary the materials the students use daily. For example, when working on inferring using wordless picture books students may be guided to infer words thought or said, emotions or the story using five different books within one week. Monday's book is different than Tuesday's book etc. The skills the students develop and instructions are repeated daily while the materials used are new and interesting to them.