



2015-2016 NOII Case Study

School: Lucerne Elementary-Secondary

District: #10 Arrow Lakes

Inquiry Team Members: Shane Douglas, Kerry Heichert,
Heather Jenkins, Rachel Walmsley

Contact: hjenkins@sd10.bc.ca

Our focus this year: How providing opportunities for at-risk students to mentor and coach younger peers with literacy-based activities will in turn provide opportunities for these learners to develop a sense of purpose, articulate their strengths, be motivated and take responsibility for their learning with respect to literacy and, hopefully, to improve their own skills as readers and writers.

Scanning: We have a school of 82 students many of which require support both educationally and emotionally. I began with a class of 22 students and ended with a class of 14 due to relocations, decisions to home school, and to enrol in our district learning option. Most classrooms are multi-aged and I have students from two – three years in my classroom. Many students are arriving at school emotionally unequipped to learn for a variety of reasons. I had noticed that a couple of my struggling students were not making progress with literacy despite different teaching approaches over the course of two years. Upon interviewing the students with respect to the four key questions, I found out that each of them had no specific idea of where they were and where they were going. They were able to identify caring adults within the school, however. I noticed that the target students were not engaged nor were they motivated or experiencing joy in the act of reading or writing. They were anxious, and, with respect to the Indigenous perspective, did not feel that their voices were valued nor were they able to articulate ways in which they could help others.

Focus: The foci of my inquiry were 1.) engagement and motivation with respect to literacy, 2) improvement with reading and writing skills, 3) help the students develop a sense of purpose and responsibility for their learning, and 4) bring enjoyment back for the target students with respect to literacy. It was important to me to bring back the fun in learning and to help my target students to develop as readers and writers by engaging them using a different approach. Self-esteem was low and providing the opportunity for mentorship and coaching was a way in which I could let these students shine and show off and, therefore; I hoped, develop a sense of purpose.

Hunch: Our hunch was that the target students viewed themselves as “helpless” learners and that reading and writing would always be difficult for them and thus not worthwhile. These learners had a long history with the Learning Resource room where they would work with the resource teacher using a pull out model.

New professional learning: We became familiar with a writing tool called “Talk/Typewriter” which the target students used to create writing pieces with their little buddies. As the target students had knowledge of “Word” and Power Point on the computer, they coached their younger peers with these programs to write poems. This led us to wonder about Kurzweil and

so together with the Learning Resource teacher, and with the support of our Special Education Assistant (SEA) who had spent many hours during professional development days learning about this program, we also became more familiar and competent with the Kurzweil program and piloted a whole class reading activity so that all students were given the opportunity to navigate and use this program. We explored ways to show learning without written output such as bringing text alive through acting, using jeopardy games to determine understandings and knowledge. The resources I found most helpful were those of my colleagues, specifically the Learning Resource teacher, Educational Assistant and the Kurzweil and Talk/Typewriter computer programs.

Taking action: I partnered my class with students from the Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom every other Friday afternoon for a literacy-based activity. We decided that my two target students would work with two at-risk students; one in Kindergarten the other in Grade 1. We felt it would be beneficial for the at-risk students in the younger class to become familiar with the Talk/Typewriter tech tool, along with my students, as they were good candidates for using it later on. As well, we thought that working with the same student would, over time help to build relationships and also aid in building my target students' confidence. We began with simple activities such as literacy centers, then moved on to writing activities such as pattern books, Christmas book, poems, and shared reading activities. The students were divided in half and worked in both classrooms. As my students were competent on the computer using "Word" they were able to also mentor and coach the younger students in order to create digital and hard copies of their writing.

My two target students fell in love with Talk/Typewriter and began using it outside of the mentoring program for other writing assignments and as we witnessed the progression of my own two target students' ability with the Talk/Typewriter program and their improved reading abilities, I, along with the Learning Resource teacher, decided to take the whole class through a literature study using Kurzweil; I was interested in how this would affect my target students' reading abilities, comprehension, and general motivation and attitudes towards reading. I booked the computer lab for a 50min morning block on M/T/W. With the help of the EA Kerry Hiechert, we introduced and modelled each step for using the program. Most students were using it independently on the third week. We tailored the comprehension questions to the students' abilities and no student could see another student's questions. We also held discussion forums and other activities to demonstrate understandings.

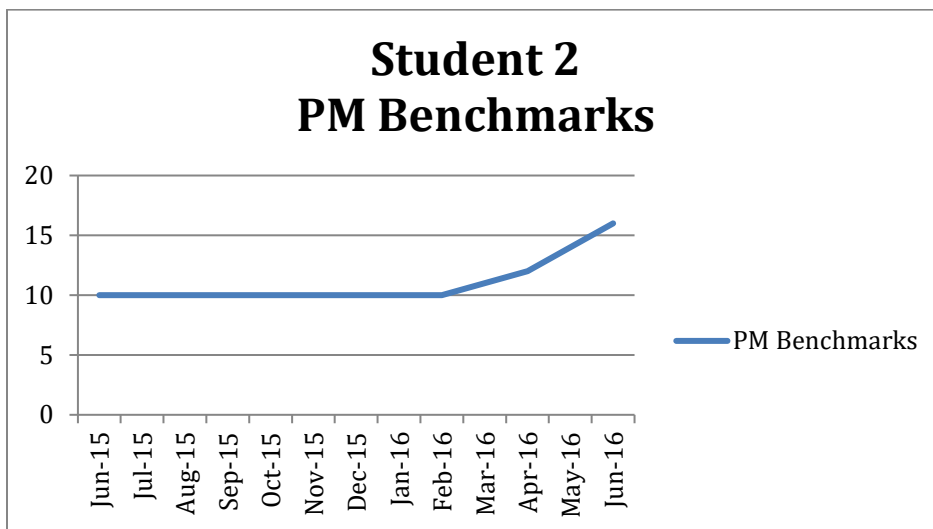
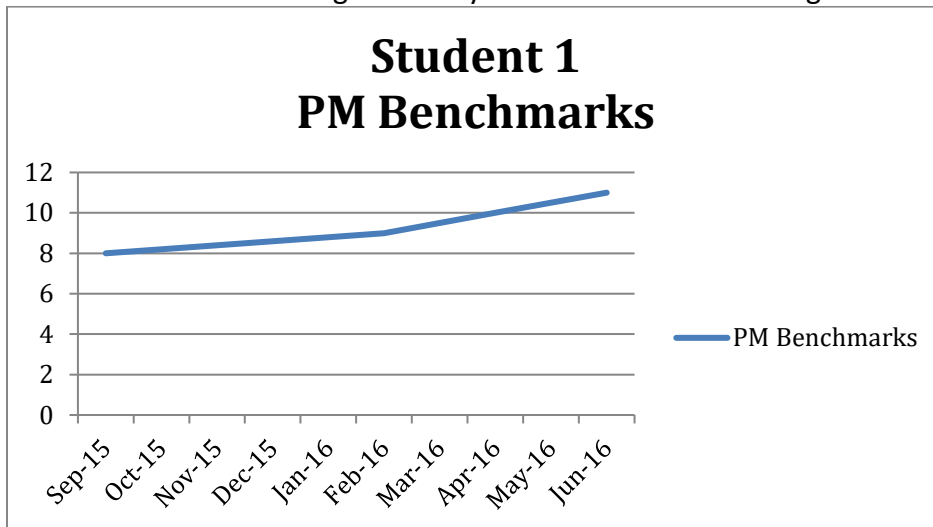
From here, we decided to take it one step further and do a literature study without the students ever opening the book. We were going to bring literature alive through acting. Students were put into teams of 3. Teams were supervised by myself, my SEA, and the Learning Resource teacher. The book we chose had 46 chapters. The study was carried out over a period of four weeks with an Introduction to the text and characters given at the start. Week one: chapters 1-15; week 2: chapters 16-30. On Monday and Tuesday teams were given synopsis for one chapter each day of which they needed to read and prepare to act out. The synopses were not in chronological order: a team could be given chapters 2 and 13. On Wednesdays, we came together to act out all scenes in chronological order thus bringing the first third of the novel alive. Discussion followed. The teachers acted out the last chapter for the students as a wrap up.

The students loved both the Kurzweil and the Acting. We found that students who would normally have very little written output to demonstrate understandings were eager and enthusiastic during discussions with insightful thoughts. Students really enjoyed having text read to them but commented that the voice used for the Kurzweil program was too monotone. All the students enjoyed acting out a novel and commented that they didn't even need to read

the book to understand it. This, we believe, increased the enjoyment of literature for those students who wouldn't willingly pick up a novel and read it.

Describe strategies you and your team decided on and how your actions worked out. Be as specific as possible – so that other teams can learn from your experience.

Checking: We took a baseline of reading abilities using both the Benchmark and DART assessments. We assessed all students in October, March, and May. The two target students were also assessed throughout the year. Data for the two target students is as follows:



Interestingly enough, the students did not begin to use Talk/Typewriter or Kurzweil until right after Spring Break. As well, our mentoring and coaching activities had been under way since October. Student 1 had long absences due to illness and, as well, was experiencing some upheaval in the home. Having said that, student 1 was eager and enthusiastic when mentoring and when faced with a writing activity said, "Yay, I like using Talk/Typewriter."

Both students were able to identify ways in which they could help others. Their confidence grew and it was enjoyable to watch them working with their younger buddies. We overheard comments such as, "Sit down, I'm trying to teach you!", and "Pay attention, this is important!" Student 2 also began to initiate more interactions with his peers. We saw a change in both students; student 2 especially.

Reflections/Advice: I started out with wanting to give my class the opportunity to mentor and coach younger peers with the intent on watching the effects on my two target students. As I progressed, different avenues opened up and we, I say we because the Learning Resource teacher and my SEA came on board, found ourselves exploring programs which we felt were tools that all students needed to be exposed to and become able to use independently at an early age, so that the “stigma” was removed and these tools were simply a part of all students’ educational tool banks to simply use as need be throughout their school careers. Exploring these programs was a constant work in progress and we were learning and problem solving alongside the students.

- The Kurzweil program should be inclusive to all students beginning at the primary level and continuing on into High School so that all students can independently navigate and use the program in varied ways to enhance learning. In this way, the stigma of using such a program is removed.
- There is power in adults working together to design learning. This includes SEAs who have valuable knowledge gained through various professional development opportunities targeted to them.
- Technology tools like Talk/Typewriter can help to improve reading skills and increase the enjoyment of writing for struggling students.
- Struggling students benefit from showing off their talents and knowledge through mentoring and coaching. Mentoring offers students the opportunity to be leaders, gain perspectives, and model behaviors conducive for learning. It allows them to have their voices heard and to keep an eye on how they can help others.
- Working and learning alongside students’ models life- long learning and, with the vulnerability the teachers experienced, helps to build students’ trust.
- Giving students the opportunity to go “outside the box” to demonstrate learning is valuable and worthwhile.
- Exploring technology may not be enough: students need to be taught how to use various programs in a competent way to support learning.

In the future, I plan to use Kurzweil as a learning tool for all students at some point during the year in order to change attitudes towards the program. As the Kindergarten/Grade 1 students were able to explore Talk/Typewriter, this program will be used as well and the students will become proficient and independent learners with the aid of this tool.

SEAs should be part of designing learning; our learning adventure would not have happened without the support and contribution of the SEA working with my students.