



2015-2016 NOII Case Study

School: William Konkin Elementary

District: #91 Nechako Lakes

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Our focus for this year: How to support struggling readers.

Scanning:

- Grades 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6-7 (Instruction in both French and English).
- Some Grade 1-2's had low knowledge of alphabet letters and sounds.
- Reading assessment scores and teacher observations of performance indicated that many students were below grade level in reading.
- They showed a lack of confidence as readers and if they struggled with reading, they didn't know what to do to help themselves or what they need to do to progress in their reading.
- Needed to be able to think more critically beyond literal meanings.
- Need to know when to apply specific word solving and comprehension strategies.
- Many read fluently but lacked comprehension for their grade level.
- Struggled with engaging students in reading more so with French reading than English reading.
- Students needed support with making suitable 'good fit' book selections.
- Students struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and ways of figuring out unknown words in text.
- We were not aware of the standards for French immersion learners. The levels which we used this year were higher than in previous years.
- Students are using their English language over the summer but do not use their French vocabulary. We think that this is resulting in more summer loss in French than in English.

Focus: Many of our learners were below grade expectations in reading in both English and French. Given the importance of reading for successful learning in all areas, we recognized the importance of developing the proficiency of our struggling readers -particularly in comprehension. This focus would also support our school goal of having all learners read grade level text with accuracy, fluency, and understanding. In addition, we saw a need to develop confidence, interest, and joy in reading.

Hunch:

- Compartmentalizing instruction by teaching a single reading strategy at a time for weeks rather than interweaving strategies may have hindered readers from developing the ability to apply strategies with independence during reading.
- We were not scheduling enough time to meet with struggling learners. Learners did not have enough opportunity to meet one on one or in small instructional groups for targeted support.

New professional learning:

- We explored research-based effective practices in teaching reading:
 - Book study: “Catching Readers Before They Fall” was very useful for providing us with an understanding of a comprehensive literacy instruction and practical examples for helping learners to develop a repertoire of skills or “reading system”. Our process to support our learning included reading selections, discussions, then making action plans for trying ideas and strategies with our learners, then coming back and reflecting on how things went and making action plans for the next time. We used the Study Guide for this book to guide our discussions and inform our plans for using the activities and teaching strategies. We recommend the use of the Study Guide as well.
 - “Joyful Literacy” strategy for Primary learners was useful for practicing and monitoring foundational skills and guiding our use of literacy centers.
 - Strategies from the book and workshop “Struggling Readers: Why Band Aids Don’t Stick and Worksheets Don’t Work” were helpful for teaching comprehension and engaging learners in reading.
- A key concept that framed our learning and our actions was that everyone has a ‘reading system’ that they currently use in the process of reading. Readers who are struggling may have an underdeveloped system for making sense of reading or need development in certain aspects of their ‘reading system’. This leads us to focus on what an individual learner may need to move their reading forward.

Taking action:

- Modeling and thinking aloud to make specific strategies visible (spotlighting) during authentic modeled and shared reading tasks.
- Strategy instruction and applications were integrated and highlighted in an ongoing and more natural manner rather than taught in isolation.
- We intentionally re-read texts for different purposes during subsequent readings – e.g. reading for meaning, vocabulary focus, decoding focus, fluency.
- We scheduled time to allow for opportunities to confer with learners and attend to individual needs.
- We intentionally tended to differentiated needs –book selection, decoding strategies, comprehension skills.
- We worked at implementing a more comprehensive literacy framework that included modeled reading, read alouds, shared reading, independent reading skills, vocabulary and word-solving strategies, and comprehension strategies.

Checking:

- We noticed that we became more mindful of our teaching practices with regard to teaching reading.
- The book study - discussion - taking action – reflection – planning next steps process with colleagues was helpful, rewarding, and our new knowledge and experience in the context of our classrooms increased our interest in teaching reading.
- By intentionally scheduling and spending more time focused on individual learners, we gained a better understanding of what our learners could/couldn’t do and what they are interested in.
- We saw growth in aspects such as checking for understanding, being aware that they should be actively reading to understand/make sense (not just reading the words), and found that making the reading fun/meaningful was important -learners were particularly engaged in doing plays/reader’s theatre.

- Putting them in situations where meaning mattered or was of interest to them increased engagement.
- We feel that we are at the early stages of our inquiry into supporting struggling readers and need to continue to discern the impact of our practices on learner's growth in reading.

Reflections/Advice:

- Using the book study to connect our inquiry to current research in reading instruction and to guide our changes in teaching practice was very helpful.
- We would recommend using "Catching Readers Before They Fall" along with the Study Guide as a resource. It is easy to read with practical examples that we found could be adapted and applied across our span of grades from Grade 1-7 for both French and English Language Arts.
- Going forward we would want to collect more data in our conversations with learners. We focused on strengths and areas to work on (e.g. Two stars and a wish) but would like to increase student input (e.g. How do you feel as a reader now? What are you doing well at? How do you know? What do you think you need to work on? How can you do that?)
- We want to pause and celebrate successes more. We want to raise their awareness of their growth and want to make their progress more visible to them.
- Increase self-assessment to involve them more fully in the goals.
- It would be valuable to connect our inquiry work to our Professional Learning Community (PLC) work in order to share a common focus for the year rather than feeling fragmented into different initiatives.
- The discussions in preparation for trying to share our learning in a concise way for the Celebration of Learning at our final District Inquiry gathering helped us review our learning journey and more fully appreciate and consolidate our learning together.
- We are interested in continuing to focus on looking at and improving our practice in terms of supporting struggling readers and incorporate other resources and ideas as we move forward.
- Good practices for supporting struggling readers are good for all readers. We can reach our struggling readers better by ensuring that on a daily basis, our struggling readers receive appropriate targeted support and as well as exposure to the rich instructional practices that good readers receive.