



2015-2016 NOII Case Study

School: Woodbank Primary School

District: #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

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This case study was carried out by three teachers all teaching grade 2/3 combined classes. The grade 2 cohort was separated for a number of reasons but behaviours affecting learning was a common factor. Many were reading below grade level so the teachers had the same focus but different actions in order to compare and share their approaches. These differences are indicated by the use of bullets in the final three sections below.

Our focus for this year: Early literacy—specifically, reading engagement and comprehension

Scanning: We orally interviewed four selected students near the start of the 2015-2016 school year and orally interviewed the same four students near the end of the school year.

Although three of the four students identified two adults who believed in them, these adults were not immediately named by the students. Surprisingly, no student identified support teachers (School Support Teacher (SST), counsellor, Child and Youth Care Worker (CYCW) or ABEA) when answering this question. Not all students identified the classroom teacher. There was some change in students' ability to identify specific actions to improve their learning (from initial to final interview) but the students still required guidance and additional work to self-assess and set meaningful, personal learning goals.

Focus: Low Benchmark scores and anecdotal reports from parents and last year's teachers indicated literacy/reading and behavior/focus for learning as areas of high need for this group of grade two students. We were hoping to improve engagement in literacy tasks, specifically reading, and raise students' Benchmark scores to levels identified as reasonable for the end of grade 2.

Hunch: Regular use of the Daily Five structure for literacy instruction allowed opportunities for every child to engage in reading at their independent level and for individual teacher guidance during Daily Five rounds.

Students in the three classes, who were identified as not meeting grade level expectations for reading, received literacy support two to three times a week, for approximately 30 minutes, from the school's two Student Support Teachers. Letter sounds and sight words were a focus and our hunch was that this out-of-class support would meet the needs of this specific group of students, who were Benchmarked at level 7 or below at the beginning for the school year.

New professional learning: Through weekly Professional Learning Community meetings, we were given information about the inquiry process (both for student and educator use). We reviewed an educational researcher's research to determine best practices for reading instruction.

One teacher attended a meeting designed for Vancouver Island educators to share and offer ideas about inquiry and assessment. Through these meetings we viewed You Tube talks by Dylan Wiliam about formative assessment.

Taking action:

- Designing classroom routines and structures to increase the time available for authentic reading and writing was the action taken. Following the Daily Five structure and teaching students the 10 steps to independence were actions taken to increase student engagement in literacy learning activities. The focus was on 14 grade 2 students.
- Each student’s prior knowledge was tested with a reading program screener, and the program placed students at a learning level that was teaching them at their level. Students were encouraged to complete a minimum of 60 min. of the program each week. These students were generally asked to work on this reading program 4-5 days a week. Since there were so many students below grade level – a greater emphasis was placed on the program to provide individual instruction than in previous years. Once a week, the student support teacher reviewed the progress of each student and provided help with any skills that were flagged as needing intervention.
 - Parent readers came every morning to practice sight words and listen to students read. It is estimated that each student practiced their sight words and read with an adult about 2-3 times each week. This practice time decreased in May and June.
 - A group of 9 students received student support (in small group settings) three times a week.
 - Students who took part in the reading program were included in the class “read to self” activity (generally 30 min.) two mornings a week.
 - When given the “Words Their Way” screener at the start of the year, it showed that 11/14 grade 2 students could identify beginning and final consonants, as well as the short vowel in CVC words. Consonant Digraphs, Blends and Long Vowel Patterns were phonics skills that needed to be taught as students had either no or minimal knowledge of them. Students worked on weekly word lists that followed the “Words Their Way” sequence, and were working on long vowel patterns by May and June.
 - Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools (NLPS) testing in the fall revealed areas of great concern for all 11 students in word recognition, and all areas of the advanced code
 - Students were taught about and encouraged to read good fit books during read to self.
- Read to Self
Students able to self-select books from the book room to match their current reading level
Direct students to appropriate bin and check books as they leave
Changing books weekly
Teacher works with students individually during these sessions, target those needing most help (able to work with 2-3) during this time
 - Word Work
Fry’s sight word list in reading basket

(first, second or third- one hundred list) students practice before or during read to self sessions

Words Their Way weekly spelling lists

- Work on Writing
lessons based on the 6 writing traits and the writing process
reading and discussing stories read aloud (walking stories, climbing stories)
students share their writing 3 times per week
- Read with someone
weekly parent helper
weekly read with a partner
- Listen to reading
daily sessions of tumble books using projector
- Computer-based programs:
two sessions per week with help from SST
school-wide computer based program
two sessions per week, students assigned to read two stories each session,
monitor progress and teach comprehension strategies
computer program- reading
iPad - phonics apps
- Home reading program for selected students using Reading A - Z leveled materials - change once each week

Checking:

Seven of the fourteen grade two students Benchmarked at or above grade level at the end of the year. One student, who was slightly below grade level in his September Benchmark, only gained two Benchmark levels this school year. Of the six students who were at Benchmark levels below 5 in September: student 1 gained five Benchmark levels; student 2 gained three Benchmark levels; student 3 gained six Benchmark levels; student 4 gained five Benchmark levels; student 5 gained eleven Benchmark levels; student 6 gained two Benchmark levels. None reached expected grade level Benchmark scores but all made a gain in levels.

- Student answers to the four questions was slightly more detailed at the end of the year but self-assessment and celebrating learning are areas for further exploration.

Results of Spring NLPS showed a marked gain in all areas with only 3/14 students not at level for word recognition and the advanced code

- Benchmark results increased for each student between 4 and 14 levels with the average increase about 9 levels

I did not use the 4 key questions in my inquiry. I would use these questions next time to include the learners in the inquiry process to a greater extent. Consider adapting questions for primary learners.

- NLPS used at the beginning of the year showed 11 students not yet within expectations in almost all areas of the assessment – phonological awareness, word recognition and decoding and at the end of the year showed only 4 still not within expectations in most areas
- PM Benchmarks used at the beginning, middle and end of the year. The average gain was about 8 levels

Reflections/Advice:

Increasing time students spend reading and writing at a student's current level with periodic teacher guidance to individual or small groups (made up of students with similar needs), increased Benchmark scores by at least five levels during the school year for most of the grade two students. The students who did not engage, did not show the same Benchmark gains.

- An article on increasing student engagement practices by Black and Williams (formative assessment experts) offered five most effective strategies for increasing student motivation and engagement. Two of the five, upon which I will focus my future teaching, are: (1) clear learning intentions (2) peer and self-assessment. The next step is to explicitly teach and plan learning activities to teach students how to self-assess their behavior and academic learning.

Upon reflection, the questions provided for the NOII case study were too broad for primary students. More concrete, specific questions would have been helpful.

- If I were to do this study again, I would include more student self-evaluation strategies. For example, I would make time to sit with each of the Lexia students and review their weekly progress and celebrate successes. I would discuss the skills that were coming up in the program and why they were important. It would have been nice to print off supplementary learning materials and use them in the class during "word work" time.

Most students increased reading levels.

- Utilize "4 Key questions" in next inquiry to involve the learner in understanding their own learning goals and steps in the process
- Continue to develop self -assessment strategies
- Provide more writing samples
- Continue with daily Read to Self and Writing - continue to provide selection of leveled reading materials (in the class or from a "book room" if it is a school wide strategy)
- try to add other word work activities and strategies, including sight word practice activities and readings
- continue home reading program for longer time period with certain students
- continue Raz kids online guided reading program
- review reading program, use more of the supporting materials
- continue to develop strategies for learners who did not show significant improvement
- Daily 5 structure - provides for differentiated learning and appears to increase literacy skills for many students

We found the inquiry process to be a very worthwhile experience providing us with the opportunity to reflect on learning strategies that were effective and on how to continue to improve instruction for all learners.